

“Enlightened Monarchy” in Practice. Reforms, Ceremonies, Self-Fashioning and the Entanglement of Ideals and Values in Late Eighteenth-Century Sweden

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This article sets out to study the entanglement of different political, ideological and moral ideals and traditions in the Kingship of Gustav III, King of Sweden 1772–1792. Political thinking and practice in Eighteenth-Century Europe offered many elements and examples that different monarchs could apply in their own particular circumstances. Gustav III was one of the European Kings that openly supported the French enlightened thinkers fashioning himself as a Reformer-King. He was also very influenced by the French culture over all, and the culture of the traditional royal court in particular. In addition the Swedish political history with a fifty-year period of decreased royal power before the coup d'état of Gustav III in 1772 influenced how the European trends and traditions were put into practice. The article pursues to understand the way different elements were bound up together and put to action by the King in his coup d'état 1772, his law reforms in the 1770s and in the establishment of a court of appeal in the town Vasa in Ostrobothnia in 1776 and the ceremonial, pictorial and architectural projects linked to this.

In this article I examine what has been called the enlightened absolutism of the Swedish king Gustav III (1746–1792) during his reign of 1772–1792. Gustav III's reign began with a royal *coup d'état* in August 1772 and ended with the king being murdered during a masquerade ball at the Royal Opera in Stockholm in March 1792. In 1772 the King was hailed as an enlightened reformer and presented himself as a champion against tyranny; twenty years later he was murdered as a tyrant. The reign of Gustav III was, from beginning to end, a balancing act between absolutist and enlightened ideals, tendencies and traditions.¹

¹ On the image of a reformer and a good King, see Alm 2002; Alm 2003; Tandefelt 2008; Tandefelt 2011. On the image of Gustav III the tyrant, see Alm 2002; Mattsson 2010.

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The aim of this article is not to argue that one or other aspect, or perspective, represented the true ambitions of the King. Rather I would like to argue that this reflects a dualism typical of the ‘enlightened absolutism’ of the 18th century.² The politics and culture of this century consisted of both new and old traditions, practices and examples with which to imitate and interact. Different ideals, practices and concepts, as well as different interpretations of such concepts, existed side by side and could be used and put into action in different situations in a very sophisticated way. All the so-called enlightened monarchs were Janus-faced in different ways.³ The case of Gustav III shows very clearly this multiplicity of objectives and results, and even the early years and upbringing of the Swedish King reflects this contemporaneity and entanglement of different traditions and ideals in eighteenth-century society.⁴ The beginning of the King Gustav’s reign in Sweden also illustrates what H. M. Scott has said about the reforms in the Habsburg Monarchy during the reigns of Maria Theresa and Josef II: “Enlightened absolutism here, as elsewhere, resulted from an attempt to apply the recent theories to a particular set of circumstances.”⁵ Different circumstances demanded, or enabled, different sets of theories, ideological arguments and elements.

The history of Gustav III as an enlightened monarch is also about the self-representation, or self-fashioning, of a monarch, and I argue that this was a process in which enlightened ideals and practices, which the King had met in early childhood, formed an important part. Yet eighteenth-century Europe also nurtured the self-fashioning of a monarch with other elements. Traditional Christian conceptions of the monarchs’ duties were still vigorous and influenced kings such as Gustav III, and his subjects, whose conceptions of the world also had an effect on how the monarchs acted and presented themselves.

2 Notions of Gustav III as an enlightened monarch were commonplace in the Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Century. See Odhner 1885; Stavenow 1901. The concept of enlightened absolutism has of course been called into question on a general level, and the enlightened character, aims and ideals of Gustav III in particular have been relativized and challenged (Boberg 1951). To this I also have to question the concept of absolutism. The Diet, the Swedish Assembly of Estates or Riksdag, continued to gather regularly about every six years during the whole period. Until 1789 the monarch ruled together with a Council of the Realm, or the Senate, consisting only of noblemen. The power of the Diet and the Council were diminished in the Instrument of Government that was imposed after the coup d’état of 1772, but these institutions were not abolished at that time. To talk about Gustavian absolutism is hence more accurate when dealing with the period after 1789 when the competence of the Diet was restricted even more by the Act of Union and Security (Förenings- och säkerhetsakten). The son of Gustav III, Gustav IV Adolf (1796–1809), only assembled the Diet once as the Act of Union and Security gave the monarch the right not to assemble the estates. In this article the concept of enlightened absolutism is treated as an image that Gustav III strived to develop for himself.

3 For a discussion on “Enlightened Absolutism”, see Scott 1990a.

4 Skuncke 1993. About the education of Gustav III as Crown Prince, see also Skuncke 1992 and Alimento 2010.

5 Scott points out that Austria’s international failure and Prussian success made the Habsburg rulers accept the priority of administrative and economic reforms. The policies that were adopted, Scott continues, “were the product of varied intellectual forces and the responses they dictated to the Monarchy’s problems”. The Prussian influence on the Habsburg reformers was immense. (Scott 1990b, 150.)

The *doxa* of classic rhetoric – meaning what the audience considers to be right and true – was as important as what the King himself thought.⁶ Other influences also affected the way Gustav III saw himself and his rule, and presented it to the surrounding world. The ceremonial and splendid court of the Sun King in Versailles – and his later emulators – was an important political example and model for Gustav III, as were the virtues and royal heroes of Swedish history. Gustav III was designated from birth as “the third Gustav”, the previous Gustavs on the Swedish throne being the founder of the Vasa dynasty and the modern Swedish nation state in the 16th century, Gustav Vasa, and “the Lion from the North”, Gustav II Adolf, who successfully led Sweden to becoming a European great power and a centralized monarchy with a strong bureaucracy in the 17th century.⁷ Beside these other impressions and role models, Gustav III was also influenced by contemporary enlightened ideas that were transmitted through his mother, his teachers – most efficiently by his governor Count Carl Fredric Scheffer, who had lively contacts with French enlightened thinkers – and his reading of Voltaire and other *philosophes*.⁸

Gustav III’s mother Lovisa Ulrika, sister of Frederick II of Prussia, the *philosophe de Sanssouci*, transmitted many values as well as practices to her son. Queen Lovisa Ulrika was a patron of literature, art and science, hosted a large library in Drottningholm Palace, founded a Royal Academy of Letters (*Vitterhetsakademien*) in 1753, and corresponded with enlightened celebrities such as Baron Grimm. Like her brother Frederick II, she liked to present herself as a *philosophe*, or in a female role, as the goddess Minerva.⁹ Besides an interest in the arts, philosophy and history, another of Lovisa Ulrika’s legacies to her eldest son was a deeply rooted belief in the

6 Rhetoric was an important part of all eighteenth-century elite education and not only formed the way in which orators, or anybody wanting to persuade an audience, talked or wrote. It also formed people’s views on how the world and relations between men worked. On the importance of rhetoric in the education of Gustav III, see Skuncke 1993. On rhetoric as a system of thinking, see Hansson (ed.) 2003.

7 See Skuncke 1993 on the conception of the third Gustav. See Burke 1992 on Louis XIV and his influence on European monarchs.

8 Count Scheffer (1715–1786) was an influential Swedish politician, for many years part of the so-called Cap Party, and Swedish minister in Paris. Charlotta Wolff has described his contacts as “remarkable”, corresponding to “the whole panoply of contemporary French critical thought and its development over three intellectual generations” (Wolff 2005, 262). In the 1760s the political ideals of Count Scheffer turned towards the physiocrats and embraced the thought of enlightened despotism that he previously had repudiated, endorsing the Swedish Instrument of Government of 1720 that hailed the liberty of the Estates and the Council of the Realm from the Monarch’s sovereignty. See Wolff 2007; Wolff 2005; Wolff 2003; Alimento 2010. See also Magnusson 1995, Herlitz 1974 on physiocratism in Sweden.

9 Lovisa Ulrika’s library and museum rooms at Drottningholm consisted of collections of coins, medals, paintings, antiquities, books and manuscripts as well as minerals and cabinets of natural history. The Royal Academy of Literature was founded under the name *Kongl. Svenska Witterhets Akademien*. Gustav III re-established the academy as The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (*Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien*) in 1786. See Laine 1998a; Laine 1998b; Radisich 2003 and Nilsson (ed.) 2003.

beneficial effects of royal power and the endeavour to strengthen the power of the Swedish monarch, which had been very limited during the Age of Liberty (1720–1772), before the *coup d'état* of Gustav III in August 1772.¹⁰

Examples of enlightened reforms and the rule of his neighbours and relatives, Catherine II of Russia and Frederick II, and of the enlightened opinions of his day overall, were also important frameworks for the rule of Gustav III. Perhaps the words of Count Mirabeau, praising the beneficial influence of Frederick the Great on the German states and the rest of Europe were idealized, when he in *De la Monarchie prussienne sous Frédéric le Grand* (1789) asserted that “profound contempt is now the fate of anyone wishing to use force to repress or punish freedom of thought”, and that “the princes and the men of letters now restrain each other”.¹¹ T.C.W. Blanning also argues that Frederick II had set an example of enlightened kingship that influenced how other German states were governed. Enlightened arguments, values and concepts were integrated in the language and rule of monarchs that did not adopt the whole philosophical package.¹² This also applies to rulers outside the German states, for instance in Sweden.

I will now place Gustav III in the context of the different influences and examples that formed the reign, reforms and self-fashioning of the King, and the Swedish background that shaped the Gustavian version of ‘enlightened monarchy’. Gustav III’s kingship and way of ruling is presented with reference to his *coup d'état* in 1772, his most notable judicial reforms and one particular law court project that was given high status in its time by Gustav III himself. This is the foundation of a court of appeal in the city of Vasa (in Finnish Vaasa) in Ostrobothnia, in today’s Finland, in 1775, three years after the coronation of Gustav III in May 1772 and the *coup d'état* of that same year.¹³ In examining the foundation of the Court of Appeal, I will pay more attention to how ceremonies, public speeches, medals and other images as well as architecture were used to work for Gustav III, and will not study what importance the Court had for the administration of law in Finland.¹⁴

¹⁰ Skuncke 1993. On Sweden during the Age of Liberty, see Roberts 1986.

¹¹ Count Mirabeau is cited in English in Blanning 1990, 276. Original quote in *De la Monarchie prussienne sous Frédéric le Grand*, vol. V, 348.

¹² Blanning 1990, 276.

¹³ This draws upon my study *Konsten att härska. Gustaf III inför sina undersåtar* (Helsinki 2008) that puts the court of appeal project in the context of Gustavian political culture, rulership and power.

¹⁴ A dissertation in the history of law has been written on this subject in Finnish, see Vepsä 2009.

The Swedish Reformer-King and His Law Reforms

The foundation of a Court of Appeal in Vasa, only three years after the *coup d'état* of 1772, can and should be seen as a project through which the King could manifest himself as a good and just monarch engaged in questions of his subjects' legal rights, security and prosperity, values that were championed by enlightened thinkers. Law and justice were central topics in the enlightened discussions of the century. The writings of the *philosophes* as well as the legal and administrative reforms conducted in Prussia, Russia, the Habsburg lands, Tuscany etc., fashioning the monarchs as enlightened reformers, gave a design or model that showed what was expected of an enlightened ruler.

Queen Lovisa Ulrika, the mother of Gustav III, and his uncle Frederick II, were close examples of how to adapt and enact this role. Close to Sweden another star on the heaven of enlightened monarchs was ascending during the adolescence of Gustav III. When he was sixteen years old, the Grand Duchess Catherine of Russia dethroned her husband Peter III in 1762. When he began to attend meetings of the Council of the Realm in 1767, the twenty-one-year-old Crown Prince Gustav was informed of the reforms of the Russian empress through reports from the admiring Swedish envoy in St. Petersburg, Baron Carl Ribbing, whose impressions of Catherine II were solely positive. Catherine II appeared in front of both her subjects and an international audience as an enlightened *legislatrix*, as a late Solon or Justinian. The summoning of a legislative commission, and the instruction that the Empress wrote to guide its work, were the talk of Europe. Furthermore, the Swedish press wrote about the Empress and her Instruction, which was published in many European languages.¹⁵

In the late 1760s and 1770s, Gustav III corresponded with European enlightened writers and he met many of them – for instance d'Alembert and the translator of Cesare Beccaria to French André Morellet – in the literary salons of Paris during his journey to France in 1770–1771. The young King certainly felt the expectations of the *république des lettres* when he ascended the throne. As Crown Prince, Gustav III had adopted the role of enlightened royalty – both impersonally meeting

¹⁵ Annens 1965, 184–185. Also see Dixon 2001, 30–31, 45–46; de Madariaga 1990, 24–37; Wortman 1995; Proskurina 2011, 49–69.

the leading figures of the French enlightenment and in his correspondence. As King he had to live up to this reputation.¹⁶

Like Catherine II, Gustav III was, for the first decade after his coup, engaged in reforming laws and the administration of the law. The laws for the Swedish realm had been brought together in a code of laws in 1734, and the jurisdiction and administration of the realm had already been unified and organized in the seventeenth century. The needs for a standardized body of law and functional jurisdiction – something that had been called for by the *philosophes* – was fulfilled. Yet the code of law of 1734 was a codification of older law practice, not the result of a law reform. Sixty-eight crimes were deemed worthy of the death penalty.¹⁷

There are two studies expressly concerned with the law reforms of Gustav III: one deals with the King and his laws regarding the Freedom of the Press and another with his criminal law reforms. These studies, which date from the 1950s and 1960s, are thorough investigations on the origins and establishments of the Gustavian laws in these two subjects, and both touch upon the question of the degree to which the King was influenced by enlightened philosophy and reforms.¹⁸

The Freedom of the Press during the time of Gustav III was studied by Stig Boberg in his dissertation in 1951. Boberg concluded that Gustav III successfully managed to present himself in public as a disciple of the *philosophes* but that his actions and the actual law texts did not echo the ambition of the enlightened thinkers that saw Freedom of the Press as a counterbalance to royal power. The King issued a Freedom of Press Act in 1774 but his main objective was to protect the Monarch, the Government and polity from criticism.¹⁹ The Freedom of Press Act of 1774 was an adapted version of an earlier Act from 1766, issued by the Swedish Government during the last years of the Age of Liberty. This earlier Act had abolished all censorship except for theological literature and consisted of a short list of topics that were not allowed to be written about and published. It also consisted of a list of topics that should be dealt with in print to the benefit of the

16 Boberg 1951, 36–40; Annars 1965, 185–186; Alimento 1997, 141–142, 147–148. The meeting of the Danish King Christian VII with the *république des lettres* in Paris 1768 has been discussed by Langen 2010. Christian VII also visited the Academy of Sciences where d’Alembert gave a welcoming speech in which he talked about the mutual advantage of cooperation between Princes and the *philosophes*. Langen points out that d’Alembert understood the value of receiving crowned heads in the Academy of Science as a means to disseminate a *l’esprit philosophique* in Europe. He gave many similar orations to visiting princes, including the reception of Gustav III in 1770. The oration to the Swedish Prince was entitled *Dialogue entre Descartes et Christine*, paying tribute to Queen Christina of Sweden as a patron of science and philosophy. (Langen 2010, 43, 47–50.) On the friendship and correspondence between Gustav III and Countess d’Egmont and Countess de Boufflers, see Hennings 1920 and Hennings (ed.) 1928.

17 Kotkas 2003, 119; Inger 1988 (1986), 159–161.

18 Boberg 1951; Annars 1965.

19 Boberg 1951, 75–76.

general public and stated what public documents were allowed to be published for the common good.²⁰

The Instrument of Government of Gustav III had abolished all laws with the status of fundamental law – including the Act of 1766 – that dated from the time after the reign of Gustav II Adolf (1611–1631). This is why Gustav III had to issue a new Freedom of Press Act, but he did not do so until the Svea Court of Appeal asked for the Monarch's comment on a situation that had arisen. Gustav III had not appointed a new censor and had, according to Boberg's interpretation, preferred the existing vague and floating praxis.²¹ A new Freedom of Press Act was issued in 1774 and, in public, paired with the King's speech to the Council of the Realm in 1773, in which Gustav III talked about the importance of the Freedom of the Press. In this speech Gustav III was especially influenced by physiocratic theories.

The physiocrat's concept of *despotisme legal* attracted the young King who had been reading le Mercier de La Rivière's *L'Ordre naturel et essential des societees politiques* (1767) carefully. However, the physiocrats also implied that subjects should be free to express and publish critical remarks, which would guide a Good Monarch. In his speech to the Council in 1773, Gustav III hailed the important effects of freedom of the press for society. The speech and the Freedom of Speech Act of 1774 were published in French in the Physiocrat's mouthpiece *Les Nouvelles éphémérides économiques* in 1775. Gustav III also sent the documents to Voltaire, who wrote a polite answer to the King. When studying the law text itself, and comparing it to the law of 1766, it is though evident that the freedom of the press had been diminished considerably. The right to publish public documents and protocols was cut down and the list of prohibited topics was extended. In the following years, Gustav III continued to curtail the possibilities for the political opposition to publish critical texts and public documents that could harm the King.²²

In his study on the Gustavian reforms of Swedish penal law, Erik Annars gives a more positive description of Gustav III as a monarch influenced by the enlightenment although he also mentions that the King was very conscious of the political points he could win as a Reformer-King. Annars shows that Gustav III was well acquainted with and interested in the European debate on criminal

²⁰ The government – called in Swedish *Kunglig Majestät* (Kungl. Maj:t) – consisted of the Council of the Realm including the King, at this time the father of Gustav III, King Adolf Fredrik. The Freedom of Press Act of 1766 was a product of the Estates, and especially of the so-called cap party that had a majority in the Diet during this time. Boberg 1951, 17–22; Bennich-Björkman 2003; Skuncke 2011.

²¹ Boberg 1951, 25–33, 71–74.

²² Boberg 1951, 34–55, and passim. A royal proclamation in 1780 and an addition to this in 1785 gave Gustav III more instruments to stop the publishing of criticism. On Gustav III, his former teacher and advisor Count Scheffer and the physiocratic theory, see also Alimento 2010; Wolff 2007; Alimento 1989.

law. He also states that the King did not use criminal law as a means to punish, pursue or silence his opponents.²³ The strategy of the Monarch was quite the opposite. Instead of repression he used communication as a means to attain control over a situation, legitimacy and power.²⁴

As part of this active and communicative strategy, Gustav III announced, in 1772, only a few days after the coup in August, that all governors and higher courts of justice in the realm should be informed that all torture-rooms (*pinorum*) were to be destroyed immediately.²⁵ This was a splendid act so typical of Gustav III, who usually acted quickly and with an element of surprise, though not always very well considered. The King's wish to lend lustre to the coup and to legitimize it was combined with a campaign against torture.²⁶ Later in the 1770s, the King's interest in enlightened reforms and criminal law led to a Royal Ordinance on infanticide (*barnamordsplakatet*) in 1778 and a reform of the criminal law, which was debated by the Diet of 1778–1779 and issued in 1779. Infanticide was a much debated question in Europe that also engaged Gustav III. His writings and actions show that he had adopted Beccaria's view that the death penalty was an inefficient means to deter people from crime.²⁷

Annars' study shows that Gustav III did not campaign against the death penalty with great vigour but that he acted, when he saw an opportunity coming, quickly and often taking people by surprise. In advocating the abolition of the death penalty for infanticide and some other crimes, Gustav III did not choose a path that was hailed by many in Sweden. The clergy and many judges and experts in jurisprudence in the country were very much against abolishing the death penalty. On the other hand, the King hoped to win the respect of the enlightened audience in Europe. Yet it must be noted that the proposition of Gustav III to the Diet in this matter coincided with the formal report of the Council of the Realm.

In his proposition to the Diet, Gustav III did not propose the abolition of the death penalty for crimes that threatened the position of the Monarch or the Government. Knowledge of a treasonable conspiracy, defamation of the Monarch and the Government was still to be punished

²³ Annars 1965, 180–181, 183–184.

²⁴ See also Alm 2003 who has characterized the strategy of Gustav III as “an aggressive struggle for discursive authority”. Alm 2003, 25 (quotation) and 25–29. As Alm and others have stated, the repressive strategies increased over the years. However, a regime of repression was only established under the son of Gustav III, Gustav IV Adolf. (Alm 2003, 29–33.)

²⁵ Annars 1965, 186. Jurisdiction prohibiting torture were issued in Prussia in 1740 and 1754, in Saxony in 1770, in Denmark in 1770, which was taken back after the fall of Struensee, in the Habsburg lands in 1775, in France in 1780 and 1789.

²⁶ Annars 1965, 186–197.

²⁷ Annars 1965, 211. Also Rautelin 2009, 27–28.

by the death penalty.²⁸ He never compromised his own power or position. The criminal law reform did not enforce all the changes that Gustav III had proposed to the Diet, but Annars states that the result of the reform was not insignificant. The number of death penalties fell in the following years. Also crimes that still by law were to be punished with death sentence led in a lesser degree to this sentence.²⁹

The Swedish Political Context: The Royalist Argumentation in 1772

Besides the obvious international influences and context for these Gustavian reforms, they must also be seen in direct relation to the Swedish political context, particular Swedish circumstances, expectations, political imagery, and also in relation to King Gustav's path to the position and power that he possessed. It is necessary to bear in mind the *coup d'état* of 1772 and the arguments and images that were developed and put into action in that process to understand the context in which, for instance, torture was abolished in 1772/1774,³⁰ or the Court of Appeal in Vasa was founded, and to interpret arguments, ceremonies, festivities, architectural and other artistic projects and images in relation to the foundation of this court of appeal.

The coup of Gustav III ended a period of some 50 years called the Age of Liberty. During this time the four political estates, assembling every three years in the Diet, and the Council of the Realm (contemporaries used the term *Senate* in French), consisting only of noblemen were the two most powerful political institutions, whereas the monarch's role was limited, even though it was seen as indispensable. The noble estate was the most influential and all high government officials were noble. The peasantry was not allowed to participate in the most important committee of the Diet, *Sekreta utskottet*, the Secret Committee. The epoch did though broaden the political field to include wider social spheres and the two rudimentary political parties that were created were active within all four political estates.³¹

²⁸ Annars 1965, 205–297. In the proposition to the Diet, Gustav III proposed that the death penalty would be abolished in cases of witchcraft, false rumours about the security of the realm, bigamy, sexual intercourse with animals, the causing of injury with a lethal weapon during a church service or legal proceedings, assault and battery of a public official, rape, manslaughter, theft (third and fourth offence), theft of church property, single adultery (fourth offence), double adultery and incest. The criminal law that was issued in 1779 was a compromise. The wishes of the King and Council were not totally accepted. Annars 1965, 252–253.

²⁹ Annars 1965, 295–297.

³⁰ The decision to destroy torture-rooms did not turn out to be a total abolition of torture. The law of 1734 knew the concept of hard prison (*svårare fängelse*). A total prohibition of all kind of torture was given in December 1774. (Annars 1965, 188–197.)

³¹ The political estates which had the right to assemble in the Diet were the noble estate, the clergy, the burgher estate and the peasant estate. See Roberts 1986, Metcalf 1977, Metcalf (ed.) 1987, Sennefelt 2011, Wolff 2011, Ihalainen 2011, Wolff 2007. About the role of the monarch and the royal family in the Age of Liberty, see Nordin 2010 and Nordin 2011.

This half century of Estate power that had emerged as a reaction against the absolute power of the Carolinian kings – the last being Charles XII – had brought negative connotations to the concepts of absolutism, autocracy, sovereignty and absolute monarchy in Sweden.³² In the coup of 1772, Gustav III aimed at increasing the power of the monarch, but he had to persuade his subjects that this had not happened because of the King’s lust for power, which was the mark of a tyrant and a despot, and that it would not lead to a restitution of absolute monarchy. If this was to succeed, previous rulers had to be presented as bad, arbitrary, self-indulgent and unjust whilst the young monarch would be portrayed as their opposite, as a Good King. Ten years earlier, Catherine II had successfully used this same strategy, and it was in fact a very traditional rhetorical technique used by politicians and in political argument for centuries, and millennia.³³ Gustav III was well acquainted with descriptions and discussions about ‘the good monarch’ and ‘the tyrant’ in philosophy, literature, drama and mythology. He had grown up with moral, political and educational stories and deliberations about good and virtuous monarchs, Voltaire’s epic poem *Henriade* (1728) being his favourite for many years.³⁴ The political cocktail was combined with the physiocratic notion of *despotisme legal*, which successfully argued the need for an impartial monarch, a safeguard of the laws, at the head of the *res publica*. This was not a belief in the monarch’s arbitrary power; on the contrary, laws were to govern society. Inherent to the idea of legal despotism was the belief that the law could and should be guarded by strong monarchs.³⁵

The rule of the Council of the Realm had already been accused as one of “ministerial aristocracy” in the meaning of a despotism of the few before the attack of Gustav III, as Charlotta Wolff has pointed out.³⁶ When Gustav III in August 1772 charged the old political establishment with

32 Sovereignty was, in this political context, mainly conceived as royal absolutism. Ihalainen 2011; Tandefelt 2011; Wolff 2007.

33 To laud and to defame were central in the classical rhetoric that was part of the education of all men of standing in the 18th century. The *genus demonstrativum* or *laudativum* was a special category of eloquence designated for orations and texts in this branch, but the capability of lauding and defaming was also useful in forensic (*genus iudiciale*) and political (*genus deliberativum*) argumentation. In the education of noblemen (and of some women that were given teaching in formal rhetoric) it was part of their early learning to exercise the ability to compose presentations of virtues and vices, and to describe selected individuals positively or negatively. The so-called progymnasmata exercises that were practised all over Europe up until the 19th century and the exercises of ‘commonplace’ or ‘koinos topos’, ‘encomium’ and ‘vituperation’ all dealt with this vital knowledge and ability of every citizen (in the old meaning of a virtuous member of society). On rhetoric and progymnasmata, see Eriksson 2002, 63–72, 136–164; Skuncke 1993, 13–18; Johannesson 1990. On Catherine II, see Proskurina 2011, 23–25, 42–43; Wortman 1995. Also see Dixon 2001, 35–37.

34 Skuncke 1993; Tandefelt 2011, 48.

35 Alimento 2010, 76. Also McNally 1990, 121–129.

36 Wolff 2007, 362–365.

notions of “unendurable aristocratic despotism” he not only trod the classic path of the rhetoric of defamation. He also very consciously followed in the footsteps of the Hat politicians, who, in 1769, had accused the Cap Senate of “abominable aristocracy”, transforming liberty into lawlessness and promoting foreign ambitions.³⁷

Gustav III and his circle of friends, advisors and supporters could continue the line of argument that had been opened in 1768–69. The rule of the estates and the last years of the Age of Liberty were pictured as chaotic, tormented by corruption, dangerous party strife and instability – not totally untrue –, and the power of the old elite was represented as despotic and aristocratic, as a despotism of the few. In this light, the power that was given to the King in the new Instrument of Government, which Gustav III introduced and the Diet accepted in August 21, 1772, could be seen as a salvation and the young King could be represented as a disinterested force which, driven by concern for his subjects and the realm, had put the old and selfish elite aside. On the day of the Coup, Gustav III recruited his Life Guard for the revolution with a speech in which he promised to suppress licentiousness and abolish aristocratic power. He affirmed that he was not going to introduce “the abominable royal absolutism or the so-called sovereignty, which would deprive me of my utmost honour to be the first citizen of a righteous free people”.³⁸ No blood was shed in the coup of August 19, 1772 even though the King needed an armed force to enforce the new regime. This too strengthened the legitimacy of the regime, as did the fact that the Instrument of Government defined and restricted the power of the King, not only those of his subjects. This was an important characteristic of a good and enlightened monarch.

Gustav III thus sought to direct the focus away from the fact that the power of the estates – that had been seen as holy in the Age of Liberty – had been dramatically diminished and on to other circumstances and associations. His use of the concept of ‘aristocratic sovereignty’ to defame his opponents, and the concept of ‘citizen’ to create a positive image for himself thus had an important Swedish political context and rationale, as well as roots in contemporary enlightened discussions and examples. This is also true of the use of the concept of ‘liberty’ or ‘true liberty’ that came to occupy a central place in the political language of Gustav III. ‘True liberty’ was in

³⁷ Wolff 2007, 364–365. Wolff quotes and refers to speeches given by Anders Schönberg (ibid. 2007, 365, n48) and Count Axel von Fersen the elder (ibid. 2007, 364, n54).

³⁸ Quoted and translated into English in Wolff 2007, 365.

this argumentation guaranteed only in a system where the law was placed above the rulers. This distinguished the new Gustavian rule from the previous rule of the Estates and the Council/Senate, in the royalist argumentation of Gustav III.³⁹

Founding a Court of Appeal and the Representation of the Reformer-King

Gustav III founded the Court of Appeal of Vasa⁴⁰ during a journey in southern Finland in the summer of 1775. Previously the King had visited southern and western parts of his realm encountering local officials and elites and other subjects in person, listening to their worries and strengthening his subjects' goodwill towards the new regime by his personal presence. In Finland, in 1775, Gustav III similarly received complaints and petitions from high and low and on 20th of June 1775 he issued a royal proclamation about the establishment of a new Court of Appeal in the realm and an increase in the number of administrative provinces (*län*) in Finland from four to six. The judges of the Court of Appeal in Åbo (Finnish: Turku) had called attention to the large number of cases that delayed the administration of justice in the area under its jurisdiction. In his proclamation, in June 1775, Gustav III stated that the new Court of Appeal was established to “remove all these obstacles, and win what is always fondly cherished by Us, namely that Our loyal subjects should enjoy Law and Justice without cessation”.⁴¹ This was totally in line with the aims of enlightened thinkers calling for a functioning jurisdiction so as to avoid unnecessary delay.

The time, energy and money that Gustav III invested in the Court of Appeal project suggest that Gustav III saw more potential in this establishment of a court of law than just efficient administration of law. The Court of Appeal project was a response to existing problems in Finland, but also very much a means for the King to develop the image of himself as a just and reforming King who was everything that the previous aristocratic elite of the Age of Liberty had not been.

³⁹ Wolff 2007; Ihalainen 2011; Tandefelt 2011.

⁴⁰ In the Swedish realm, the administration of law had been organized on three levels since the early 17th century. There was the local level with district courts in the countryside and in the towns. A second level was the Courts of Appeal (*hovrätt*) that were established to superintend the work of the district courts. The first Court of Appeal was Svea hovrätt that resided in the Royal Castle in Stockholm. It was founded in 1614. The third level was the Council of the Realm, of which a section including the Monarch (*justitierevisionen*) handled appeals from the second level. Their duty was to examine and ensure that the verdicts of the Courts of Appeal were in accordance with the law, but they could also reduce sentences, for instance change a death penalty to imprisonment. This often happened. After the reform of the criminal law in 1779, which did not abolish the death penalty for as many crimes as Gustav III had proposed, the *justitierevision* changed, more often than had been the case before, the death penalty to less harsh penalties. (Annars 1965, 295–297). The competence of this section of the Council should not be confused with the competence of the Monarch to grant an amnesty, a role that was founded on grace, not justice. In 1789 Gustav III founded a Supreme Court (*Högsta domstolen*) to replace the section of the Council called the *justitierevisionen*. I will not go into this court project of Gustav III here.

⁴¹ Tandefelt 2008, 146–147. “At för all framtid undanrödja alla dessa swårigheter, och at winna hwad Oss altid ömt om hiertat är, nämligen, at Wåre trogne undersåtare mage Lag och Rätt utan uppehåll til godo niuta.”

Ceremonies, rhetoric, images and architecture were used to create and spread this message, and to inculcate the notion of a King that was deeply interested in the wellbeing of his subjects as well as a steadfast head of justice in the realm. Gustav III could have confined himself to locating the Court of Appeal in an already existing building in Vasa and it could have been installed discreetly. The first Swedish court of appeal, *Svea hovrätt*, founded in 1614, was inaugurated only in the presence of the Council of the Realm. Instead, Gustav III himself participated in a large-scale inauguration ceremony in the Royal Castle in Stockholm in which he gave himself a visible role. He also initiated an expensive building project in the fairly remote region of Ostrobothnia, ordering, in 1776, the chief architect of the realm, Carl Fredrik Adelcrantz, to plan a new law court building to be built in Vasa. It was completed in 1786 and inaugurated in a local ceremony that same year.

During the years 1776–1786, Gustav III was engaged in the building project. He decided the principal outline for the court building, commented on the drawings of the architect and decided that the limestone frieze on the avant-corps of the façade should be decorated with the words *Gustavus III R. S. Anno Imp. XII extruxit Themidique dicaVit*, “Gustav III King of Sweden erected in the twelfth year of his reign and consecrated to Themis”, that is *Justitia*, the goddess of justice. The architect had suggested a passive wording: *ANNO. VI. REGNI. GUSTAVI. III. THEMIDI. HÆC. AEDES. NOVAE. EXSTRUCT*, “This building was erected to Themis in the sixth year of the reign of Gustav III”.⁴²

The Court of Appeal in Vasa began its work on the 19th of August 1776, four years to the day after the *coup d'état*. The date was chosen by Gustav III, and, in a letter to the president of the Court of Appeal, Baron Kurck, the King expressed a wish that the first session be held bearing in mind the happiness with which the fatherland (*fädernesland*) had been blessed four years earlier.⁴³ In Stockholm Gustav III planned the installation ceremony of the Court of Appeal, which was held on the 28th of June 1776 in the Royal Castle in Stockholm, in the presence of the King and the Royal family, and he ordered both a medal and a painting to commemorate the act.

⁴² The difference in years – sixth and twelfth year of the King’s reign – is due to the time taken to complete the work. The text line that Adelcrantz had planned for the façade facing the yard – *DISCITE IUSTITIAM MONITI* – that talked about the court’s mission to explore justice was never realized. (Tandefelt 2008, 211–212.) Regarding the building of the Court of Appeal in Vasa, see, *ibid.* 192–196, 201–223.

⁴³ Tandefelt 2008, 191.

The Court of Appeal in Vasa has not been recognized as one of the important reforms of Gustav III. Its importance was chiefly local.⁴⁴ Yet in the early years of his reign Gustav III did incorporate the Vasa project in a narration of his supposedly glorious epoch on the Swedish throne. This narration started with the coronation in May 1772, continued with the institution of the Royal Order of Vasa⁴⁵ – to reward people within agriculture, mining industry, art, trade and technological advances – that same month, the coup d'état and Instrument of Government in August 1772 and concluded with the establishment of the Court of Appeal of Vasa in 1775. The King planned a pictorial presentation of these important events in his reign, starting with the coronation and the introduction of the new Instrument of Government in 1772. In 1778, two years after the installation ceremony of the Court of Appeal of Vasa in Stockholm, the King ordered a large-scale painting of the judges kneeling in front of the king swearing the oath of allegiance from the artist Carl Gustaf Pilo. The choice to depict precisely this scene of the inauguration ceremony is very telling. The principal character of the scene would have been clear to anyone looking at the painting. The artist also made a painting of the coronation in 1772, which was never entirely completed but can be seen today in the National Museum in Stockholm. The painting of the ceremony of 1776 was not realized at all. Pilo only completed a pen-and-ink drawing of the scene that the king wanted to be captured for posterity in an oil painting.⁴⁶

Another royal painting project that was planned but never completed during these years was an oil painting depicting the four speakers of the Diet signing the Instrument of Government in August 1772. Gustav ordered this painting from the artist Lorenz Pasch the younger who painted many portraits of the king. The painting was to be six Swedish ells high and broad, which is about 3.5 x 3.5 meters. None of these large oil paintings, which the King had ordered, were realized except for the painting of the coronation which was not finished. The reason for this is not clear. Perhaps Gustav III's finances were insufficient to carry through the orders. The large building project in Vasa swallowed a lot of money over the following ten years. It is also possible that the

44 On the work of the Court of Appeal, see Vepsä 2009.

45 Vasa here did not refer to the city of Vasa but to the Vasa Dynasty from which Gustav III, being a Holstein-Gottorp, was also descended. Both the Royal Order and the Court of Appeal were part of the King's project to create links between himself and the name of Vasa. (The city of Vasa was founded 1606 by Charles IX, son of the first Vasa King, Gustav Vasa.) Among others, the *philosophe* the Marquis de Mirabeau was made a Knight Commander of the Order of Vasa in 1772. Abbé Michelessi, a learned writer, savant, teacher of rhetoric and cosmopolitan wanderer travelling from court to court, wrote a poem in Italian, *Per l'Ordine Reale di Wasa*, celebrating the creation of the Royal Order and the enlightened King, who in this way supported science, agriculture, the arts, etc. Tandefelt 2008, 59, 61–63; Alimento 1997, 144.

46 Tandefelt 2008, 182–184.

King's interest was directed to other projects, and the artists may have found other paintings and projects more interesting and lucrative.⁴⁷

Even though the two paintings were never realized, the projects bear witness to Gustav III's wish in these years to start a series of paintings depicting important moments of his reign. The coronation, the Order of Vasa, the Instrument of Government and the Court of Appeal in Vasa were all important stages in the King's own story that Gustav III wanted to tell and make convincing. It was a story of a reformer, but equally a story of a strong monarch leading his realm with a steady hand, and standing at the centre of all decision making. The Janus face, the balancing act between different ambitions and the entanglement of traditions, values and examples permeated the project. A close-reading of the inauguration ceremony reveals further layers.

A Lit de Justice in Stockholm 1776

The aims of the King can also be read in the inauguration ceremony of the Court of Appeal. It was held at the royal castle in Stockholm on the 28th of June 1776. It was a splendid ceremony, apparently, to a great extent, designed by the King himself. Studying the orations and spatial and pictorial programmes of the ceremony, as well as the festivities arranged in honour of the inauguration act, it is apparent that the message that the King wanted to transmit was a mixture of many traditions, talking both about enlightened reforms and the supremacy of the monarch.⁴⁸ Setting it all in Stockholm, at the Royal Castle, gave the ceremony and the Court of Appeal visibility and prestige.

After the coronation in May 1772 no state ceremony had been organised on such a grand scale. Three courts of appeal had been founded in the realm, all in the 17th century. Svea, Åbo and Göta courts of appeal were founded in 1614, 1623 and 1634 respectively in Stockholm, Turku and Jönköping but there was no given pattern as to how a court of appeal should be installed, and no written documentation.⁴⁹ Gustav III had a free hand in designing a ceremony that satisfied his needs and ambitions. The installation ceremony was organized in the Royal Castle, in the Hall of the Palace Halberdiers of the Queen, a military guard with ceremonial tasks at the royal court. As the courtier, Baron Gustaf Johan Ehrensvärd wrote in his diary, the purpose of the King was

⁴⁷ Tandefelt 2008, 182–185; Jungmarker 1973, 37–47.

⁴⁸ Tandefelt 2008, 161–185.

⁴⁹ Ehrensvärd 1877, 58. A superior court of justice in the German states that Sweden acquired in 1648, *Tribunalet i Wismar*, was founded in 1653. The installation ceremony was preserved and published in Lünig in 1720, 1397–1398, but was not treated as a model for the ceremony in 1776. The difference between the situation and context of these courts was too great.

to organize a ceremony that could be seen by many. A small and exclusive installation would not have reached this purpose, “it would not have resembled a *lit de justice*”, baron Ehrensvärd wrote. The *lit de justice* (bed of justice) was a ceremony with medieval roots, originating from the world of French royal ceremonies and from the Parliament of Paris, a Court of Appeal that also had political rights related to the King’s legislative competence.⁵⁰

In the late eighteenth-century, the *lit de justice* ceremony in the Parliament of Paris signalled absolute royal power and the parliament’s constitutional opposition to it. On a more general level, the *lit de justice* represented the monarch’s judicial rights and duties, and his role as the supreme judge of the realm. Justice was also in the monarchy of the *ancien régime* “le base & le fondement du Trône des Rois” and “l’ame de toutes les autres vertus” – “the base and foundation of the throne of Kings” and “the soul of all other virtues” – as the French jurist Claude-Joseph de Ferrière declared in his *Dictionnaire de Droit et de Pratique, Contenant l’explication des termes de Droit, d’Ordonnances, de Coutumes & de pratique* (1740). The Monarch’s duty to render justice to his subjects was in the opinion of Ferrière every Prince’s principal, most important right and duty, the most beautiful pearl in his crown.⁵¹

Gustav III wanted to install the Court of Appeal in Vasa as a great public act, and the fact that Baron Ehrensvärd talks about a *lit de justice* in his diary makes it plausible that this was a concept that was used in the royal court when planning the ceremony. After ascending the throne in 1771, Gustav III had reorganized the royal court, its organisation and etiquette using the court of Louis XIV as model. Paradoxically, life at the Swedish court became formalised and was guided by more ceremony and etiquette at a time when such tendencies were in decline at the French court.⁵² In line with this the inauguration of the court of appeal was designed to be splendid and ceremonious, and the King himself was to participate. The conceptual connection to the *lit de justice* hints that the reason for making this ceremony in particular so magnificent and demonstrative was that it allowed the King to enact his role as protector of law and order in the ceremony. Gustav III created a situation and scene in which he could personify and exhibit this

⁵⁰ The Parliament of Paris had the right to register the edicts that the King of France had passed in the Cabinet. In the 18th century the parliament of Paris acted against the monarch, opposing Louis XV. If the parliament did not want to register the edicts, the King could force registration by participating in parliament in a *lit de justice*. Louis XV closed the parliament of Paris in 1771. Four years later his successor Louis XVI again allowed the parliament to return to its duties, and celebrated this with a formal *lit de justice* ceremony. See Hanley 1983; Hanley 1985; Giesey 1985; Harouel 1990a, 883–884; Harouel 1990b, 1151–1153, Harouel 1996, 746–748; Chaline 1996, 960, 963–964; Shennan 1994, 547.

⁵¹ de Ferrière (1740) 1749, 137–138, quoted in French in Tandefelt 2008, 152.

⁵² Rangström 1994.

royal function and show that he had devoted himself to the good of his people, as he had promised to do in 1772. The overt ceremony of the occasion was not only an expression of the increased formality of the Swedish court. It was also chosen because Gustav III needed this ceremony at this particular time.

Gustav III was not alone in his use of grand ceremony. Only eight years before the Court of Appeal of Vasa was inaugurated in Stockholm, Catherine II had inaugurated the great Legislative Commission in Moscow, in the Kremlin, in the summer of 1767. The ceremony, in which all the members of the commission from all parts of the empire participated, was magnificent, and organized only five years after the dethroning of the empress husband, Peter III in 1762. The commission, and the *Instruction*, as well as the inauguration on July 30, 1767, presented the empress as a just monarch who ruled more through the wisdom of her laws than by force.⁵³ The metropolitan of Moscow, Dmitri, in his oration described the empress as a new Justinian, and the Vice Chancellor of the Empire encouraged the members of the council to follow the example of the Empress and act as unselfishly as she did.⁵⁴

The crowned heads of Russia and Sweden not only shared an interest in judicial reforms, they were also both part of the same European ceremonial political culture, in which abstract actions, personal relations, power relations, transitions, life and death, etc. were materialized and communicated through ceremonies, words, images, music, space, and relations. In this culture, things were not real if they were not shown to be real, manifested. That is why ceremonies were so important and are to be found on all levels of early modern society, throughout the Eighteenth Century.⁵⁵ A ceremony is a planned programme that communicates a message. It is a programme that has a designed message or messages, but is also an open process where the organizer can never totally control the audience's or the participants' interpretations and acts, even though this is usually what it seeks to do.

The reception of a ceremony was never the same as the intention of the sender, but the latter is always much easier to study. The sources usually tell us much more about the intentions and visions of those who planned the programme. However, ceremonies could be very persuasive as they did

⁵³ This was also how the member of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts P. P. Chekalevskii explained the marble statue of the empress that was sculpted by F. F. Shubin – “Catherine the Legislator” – in Potemkin's Tauride Palace. The empress was, according to Chekalevskii, shown ruling “more by the strength of wisdom of her laws than by monarchical power”, cited in English in Dixon 2001, 45, and in Hartley 2008, 171.

⁵⁴ Wortman 1995, 127–128; de Madariaga 1990, 24–37. A collection of fundamental works in jurisprudence, often referred to as *Corpus juris civilis*, was issued from 529 to 534 by order of Justinian I, Eastern Roman Emperor.

⁵⁵ Tandefelt 2008, 31–32; Olden-Jørgensen 2002, 66–68. Also Apostolidès 1981; Burke 1992; Wortman 1995.

not just consist of spoken words, something that is also true today. Visual images, ornaments, objects, textiles, music, and the architectural surroundings are all part of the ceremony and shape the experience of it. They talk to the audience on different levels, through different means. They mediate messages to the heart, mind, eyes, and ears, and appeal to reason, emotions and aesthetic perceptions.

Words and Images in Stockholm in 1776

Gustav III gave two speeches during the inauguration ceremony, one to the audience and the other to the newly appointed court. Gustav III, who had given his first public speech when he was three years old and had got a thorough education in rhetoric, wrote and gave most of his speeches himself.⁵⁶ His two speeches on this day in July 1776 were short but well-ordered and striking, austere and well adapted to the solemnity of the situation. There were no excessive metaphors, hyperboles, allusions or personifications, no references to ancient mythology or literature.

The first speech was about why the king had founded the court of appeal, and why it was necessary. A central phrase came at the beginning: “*Rättwisans owälduga skipande har förnämligast fästet min uppmärksamhet*”, “the unbiased administration of justice has in particular drawn my attention”.⁵⁷ Gustav III attested that during his journey in Finland in the summer of 1775 “my chief aim has been to remedy the deficiencies that pestered my subjects in the regions I have travelled through”.⁵⁸ The focus is very much set on the aims and roles of the eighteenth-century enlightened monarchs: unbiased and reliable justice and the monarch’s duty to relieve his or her subject’s pains and torments. Yet Gustav III did not refer to the contemporary monarchs of Europe in his speech. Instead he claimed legitimacy by referring to his predecessor on the throne, the great seventeenth-century king Gustav II Adolf. In the *coup d’état* in 1772,

56 On the role of rhetoric in the education of Gustav III, see Skuncke 1993. In a comparison between Gustav III and Gustav IV, Adolf Mikael Alm has concluded that the former was a king that used language to gain and maintain authority whereas the latter was a silent and silencing king. For instance, the father gave many public speeches whereas the son did not speak in public very often. (Alm 2002; Alm 2003, 25–33.)

57 *PROTOCOLL, Hållit wid Kongl. Wasa Hof-Rätts Installations Act På Stockholms Slott then 28 Junii 1776. Förmiddagen*, Stockholm s.a. For a full scale analysis of the message and rhetorical elements and construction of this speech, see Tandefelt 2008, 167–171. The minutes from the inauguration act in Stockholm were also translated into French: *Traduction De L’Extrait Du Procès Verbal, Tenu au Chateau de Stockholm, à L’Installation du Parlement de Vasa. Vendredi 28 Juin 1776, du Matin*, Stockholm s.a.

58 *PROTOCOLL, Hållit wid Kongl. Wasa Hof-Rätts Installations Act [...] s.a.*; Tandefelt 2008, 168. “... har mitt förnämsta föremål varit, at bota the brister, som trykt mine Undersåtare i the Landsorter Jag genomfarit.”

Gustav III had also claimed that he had reintroduced the political order of the time of Gustav Adolf, before the absolutism of the Carolinian kings (1681–1720).

In a crescendo directing the attention on Gustav III himself and his forefather, the King said:

These are the achievements [the King's endeavours in Finland in the summer of 1775] that I today in your presence complete: when I, according to the example that King GUSTAF [II] ADOLF has given to Me, with My Royal Power and Authority, invest them I have chosen, with the task to be My Supreme panel in Vasa.⁵⁹

The number of references to “I”, “Me” and “My” is impressive in just a few lines. When the members of the Court of Appeal stood on the first step before the throne, their authorization document was read aloud and then Gustav III spoke to them, reminding them of their duties to the Monarch and to the inhabitants of their jurisdiction. As the representatives of the King in Ostrobothnia they were, like Gustav III himself, to intimidate the evildoer and protect the innocent.⁶⁰ Finally, Gustav III talked about how the Court was to act in relation to the different social categories and estates, presenting society in its hierarchical, ancient-regime form.⁶¹

The Chancellor of Justice read the eighth chapter of the Code of Judicial Procedure, about the tasks of the Court of Appeal, the judges pledged their oath of allegiance to the King and Government, and then the president of the court of appeal, baron Adolf Fredrik Kurck, was allowed to give a speech and to kiss the King's hand. Then Gustav III himself presented Baron Kurck with the law of 1734, the Instrument of Government and the seal of the Court of Appeal.⁶²

The objects and images used in the inauguration ceremony in Stockholm in 1776 accentuated the monarch's duty and inherent competence to uphold justice, to protect the good and to punish the criminal. The sword of the realm was the most visible of the regalia in the ceremony, reminding the audience of the king's obligation and right to maintain justice in the realm. The Code of Laws from 1734 and the Instrument of Government from 1772 were other crucial objects that were carried in procession and handed between the participants, and most importantly from the king

59 *PROTOCOLL, Hållit wid Kongl. Wasa Hof-Rätts Installations Act* [...] s.a.; Tandefelt 2008, 170. “Thet är thetta verk jag i dag uti Eder närwaro fullbordar: tå Jag, enligt thet efterdöme Konung GUSTAPH ADOLPH Mig lämnat, Men Min Konungsliga Magt och Myndighet bekläder, them Jag utsedt, at wara Min Högsta Nämnd uti Wasa.”

60 *PROTOCOLL, Hållit wid Kongl. Wasa Hof-Rätts Installations Act* [...] s.a.; Tandefelt 2008, 171.

61 Tandefelt 2008, 172–174.

62 Tandefelt 2008, 166–167.

to the judges of the court of appeal, which could be read as an act symbolizing that law and justice came from the monarch. The authorization document that was signed by Gustav III and the seal of the Court of Appeal were also objects that the Chancellor of Justice brought to the king on velvet cushions and that were then presented to the judges. Both the fact that the objects were given to the members of the court by the King and the objects themselves communicated meaning.⁶³

The Code of Laws and the Instrument of Government were of course natural objects to integrate into the ceremony that inaugurated a Court of Appeal. The basis of the judicial system was the law, and the president swore his oath of allegiance to the King and the Government with two fingers on the Code of Laws and the Bible. As shown above it was important for Gustav III to be strongly associated with the law at this point of his reign, and the ceremony in the Royal Castle provided a setting for staging this connection between monarch and law in live acts, words and images.

The expensive and time-consuming paintings mentioned above were never carried out but other media and art forms were used. The seal of the court of appeal of Vasa was engraved by Gustaf Ljungberger and represented a known mythological topic, Hercules crushing the Lernaean Hydra. In his other hand Hercules held a shield with the coats of arms of the Vasa and Oldenburg dynasties. The king himself was credited with inventing the image by the courtier Baron Ehrensvärd. The Baron thought that Hercules represented the court, and criticized the imagery because the Court of Vasa had not yet had the opportunity to vanquish the Hydra.⁶⁴ Ehrensvärd must be mistaken here. It is more likely that Hercules represented Gustav III and that the hydra represented the bad rule of the previous regime that Gustav III had vanquished in 1772. In an engraving by Johan Fredrik Martin from 1784 this same representation is used and given the following words of explanation: “Gustave III armé de la massue d’Hercule ecrase l’hydre de la discorde et de l’anarchie.”⁶⁵ The Hydra was the licence, discord and anarchy of aristocratic rule in the Age of Liberty, as portrayed by Gustav III. Ehrensvärd’s mistake gives us a salutary reminder that the symbolic images, metaphors and allegories that were invested with a particular meaning by their creator or inventor were not always understood in that sense by the intended

63 Tandefelt 2008, 176–185.

64 Ehrensvärd 1877, 62.

65 Tandefelt 2008, 178–179.

recipient or audience. People misunderstand, and they also consciously come up with alternative interpretations.⁶⁶

Even though mythological images and representations were lacking in the speeches of Gustav III and of president Baron Kurck, they were not totally missing in the ceremony, as Hercules on the seal of the court of appeal shows. Another personification from the world of mythology was *Justitia*, the female personification of justice that was engraved on the medal that Gustav III had also ordered from Ljungberger in order to commemorate the foundation and inauguration of the Court of Appeal of Vasa and put to his series of medals, his *histoire métallique*. “MISERIS PERFUGIUM MALIS PERNICIES” (“refuge for the wretched, the death of the wicked”),⁶⁷ was the legend of the medal, a line from the Roman historian Sallust’s *Coniuratio Catiline* (*The Conspiracy of Cataline*): “Caesar dando sublevando ignoscundo, Cato nihil largiundo gloriam adeptus est. in altero miseris perfugium erat, in altero malis pernicies.”⁶⁸ Inscriptions and legends, like images, were often taken from ancient Roman literature that provided a large stock of lines like this, which could be used for different purposes, as well as useful allegories, stories, exempla (*exemples à imiter*), etc.

The line from Sallust leads us to the occasion where Cato and Caesar talk to the roman senators and argue for and against – the traditional *pro* and *contra* of classical rhetoric – the death sentence. Caesar argued against, Cato in favour of a sentence of death, and Sallust describes the two orators: “They both attained glory: Caesar by giving, helping and forgiving; Cato by not bribing. In one there was refuge for the wretched, in the other death for the wicked.”⁶⁹ Sallust, and later Gustav III, here caught two traditional aspects of kingship, two traditional ways of ruling that appear time and time again in literature.

Sallust wrote about the last centuries of the Roman republic and its crises. He saw man’s greed and lust for power as a peril for society and was particularly critical of the nobility (*nobiles*) and described it as a decadent and corrupt class that held the highest offices in the empire. Some virtuous men (*virtute clari*) had had the capacity to influence the course of history, among

66 About intentional travesties of Gustavian images and narratives, see Skuncke & Ivarsdotter 1998; Mattsson 2010. About ridiculing Catherine II, see Proskurina 2011, 256–285.

67 Translation into English by William B. Batstone: Sallust 2010, 42–43.

68 *Concordantia in Corpus Sallustianum* 1991, 723.

69 Sallust 2010, 42–43.

them Cato and Caesar.⁷⁰ Sallust's description of Rome corresponded well to Gustav III's view of the moral and political status of Sweden in the Age of Liberty. It resembled the arguments of Gustavian political rhetoric, which described the previous political elite as greedy, biased, power-seeking and unjust. The legend quoting Sallust was presumably intended to direct the thoughts of contemporaries in this direction. The monarch himself took the role of the 'virtuous man' in this setting, returning justice, liberty and security to his subjects. In Sweden in the middle of the 1770s, Sallust could talk to people assembled in the Hall of the Palace Halberdiers and they could share a moral universe of values, stereotypes and expectations. *Coniuratio Catilinae* was used in the teaching of Latin and rhetoric at the time because it consisted of many useful speeches and orations for students to imitate and learn from, in many senses. Also the ones that did not accept the story that Gustav III was telling about himself and his aims were raised with the same classical political concepts and values.⁷¹ And they certainly knew and identified their Sallust.

Representing the Good and the Bad Monarch

The audience in the Hall of the Palace Halberdiers consisted mostly of courtiers, high government officials and foreign diplomats and only a small element fell under the category of 'general audience'. Later in the evening the same noblemen and noblewomen could take part in the festive programme in the court that most certainly was linked to the ceremony and message of the day. The King and Queen gave a reception, a *cour*, in the Queen's Great Gallery and after this Gustav III held a Grand Public Supper in the King's dining-room. This was a ceremony that Gustav III had introduced when becoming king, when he initiated many new court ceremonies borrowed from the court of Louis XIV.⁷² After this, supper was served to the courtiers, the members of the Court of Appeal of Vasa and to other participants, the diplomats, public officials, etc.⁷³

The night was completed with two plays at the Royal Theatre. The first performance was that of the first act of the play *Thetis et Pelée* by Fontenelle, in a Swedish version, translated by Johan Wellander and Gustav III. *Thetis och Pelée* was the first big attempt at Swedish opera

⁷⁰ Paananen 1980, I–III, X.

⁷¹ Wolff 2007.

⁷² Rangström 1994. In Versailles the practice of royal grand public suppers – with the king eating alone in public – was abandoned at this time.

⁷³ Tandefelt 2008, 185.

and marked the beginning of national opera when it was inaugurated in Stockholm in 1773. The goddess of water Thetis is loved by a mortal, Pelée, and by two gods, Neptune and Jupiter. In Gustav III and Wellander's version, the two gods were made into examples of the good monarch and the tyrant, a theme that was in concord with the political message transmitted during the inauguration ceremony.⁷⁴ After this an opera-comique of Marmontel, *Lucile*, was performed in translation by Anna Maria Malmstedt, more known in Swedish literary history by her married name Madam Lenngren. Here the theme was the good subject and the comic story revolves around loyal peasants. This probably was not a coincidence as both the good king and the good subjects/peasants had been present in the inauguration ceremony and its speeches.

For Whom Was All This Performed?

Who was the intended audience for all this? How can we know the effect of all these efforts of the King and his circle of supporters, favourites and advisors? Was it of any importance what plays were performed in the Royal Castle? Many questions remain open, although some of them can be at least partly answered. The diplomats were the channel to the monarchs and courts of Europe. That is why the diplomatic corps was always invited, and why the court festivities actually reached a much larger audience than one might at first think. To reach this important European audience the protocol from the inauguration ceremony was also translated into French thus allowing it to be more widely distributed outside Sweden. Gustav III wished to present himself as an enlightened King in the eyes of the enlightened circles of Europe.

It is also important to remember that the noblemen and women at Court, who were both audience and co-players in the court's rituals, were also influential members of society and political life, belonging to a political estate that was still the most important estate of the Diet. The opinion of this estate was very important for Gustav III. The persuasive images and conceptions that the King sought to create and strengthen by organizing ceremonies, buildings, pictures and speeches was intended to be noted in all estates, and also in the countryside. The support of the lower estates was also important for Gustav III. The Court of Appeal was given a lavish building in Vasa, decorated with few but well thought-out and particular ornaments on the façade and in the

⁷⁴ Skuncke & Ivarsdotter 1998, 61–69.

interior. Local peasants were involved and contributed to the building with building materials. The peasants were thanked for their contribution by inscriptions. A stone tablet on the inner wall of the building, which today is a church, tells us of the contribution of the peasants of Ilmajoki and Isokyrö parishes.

A broadsheet with a popular poem about the inauguration ceremony in Stockholm was also published, as was the protocol of the act. The ceremonies in Vasa in 1776, and in 1786 when the building was used for the first time, could also attract a socially more differentiated set of observers than the programme in Stockholm.⁷⁵

Finally, the ceremonies, the building, the images and concepts were all messages for posterity. Gustav III sought to impress future generations and win their admiration. Gustav III like all other monarchs sought to influence and control the way in which he would be remembered by posterity.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Gustav III was an *ancient-régime* monarch, a product of the old world, integrating new ideals, concepts and figures of thought with old models. His court was very much a ceremonial court and the court's culture was an instrument to serve his political aims and ambitions in domestic and foreign politics.

The new, 'Gustavian' realm was built through new public buildings, new cities, roads and fortifications; on a judicial level through new laws, judicial reforms and ordinances; and on a symbolic level through concepts and images, in ceremonies, pamphlets, medals, pictures, plays, operas and belles-lettres. The court of appeal in Vasa was part of this construction of a Gustavian Sweden that involved all of these levels.

⁷⁵ Tandefelt 2008.

⁷⁶ Delblanc 1965.

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