

Playing King

Maria Berlova

ABSTRACT

The Swedish King Gustav III ruled from 1771 to 1792. His departure to the Russian war in 1788 was staged as a grandiose spectacle. The King, who was also a playwright, made the day of his departure coincide with the symbolic date of June 23. This was the date that Gustav II Adolph (ruled 1611-32) went off to the Thirty Years' War in 1628. The parallel between Gustav III and the great Swedish warrior King was further emphasized by his costume made in the style of Gustav Adolph. In this article, the author analyzes Gustav III's departure to war as a theatrical event and explores the borders of theatrical events in the late eighteenth century. Gustav III's ceremonial departure is placed in the framework of Nikolai Evreinov's and Yuri Lotman's theories of theatricality which show how the King applied theatrical means to everyday life in order to theatricalize it, i.e. to make it spectacular and symbolic. By theatricalizing life Gustav III idealized his role of king and thus *performed* his power. Theatricalization of political life not only adorned life but it also significantly changed reality; the theatrical playing of the King entailed real consequences – Gustav III enacted his role of a monarch in a memorable way and achieved his political goals. The interaction between politics and theater is the main focus of the article. The author also explores the poetics of theatrical playing in politics. Obviously, the relation between the King-performer and his subjects-spectators was different from the usual actor-spectator relation in the traditional theater. During the communication of the King-performer and his subjects-spectators the political context was of significant importance; the main purpose of such communication was political propaganda. As a result of his ceremonial departure and, eventually, the theatricalization of war, the King succeeded in becoming a national hero among the simple people, which proves the efficacy of theatrical means.

Keywords: Gustav III, theatricalization of politics, Swedish theater of the 18th century, Yuri Lotman, Nikolai Evreinov, Catherine the Great.

BIOGRAPHY

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The Swedish King Gustav III ruled during from 1771 to 1792. His departure to the Russian war in 1788 was staged as a grandiose spectacle. The King, who was also a playwright, made the day of his departure coincide with the symbolic date of June 23. This was the date that Gustav II Adolph (ruled 1611-32) went off to the Thirty Years' War in 1628. The parallel between Gustav III and the great Swedish warrior King, who is credited as the founder of Sweden as a Great Power as he led Sweden to military supremacy during the Thirty Years' War, was further emphasized by his costume. According to Frederick Axel von Fersen, Gustav III wore a camisole decorated in the style of Gustav II Adolph with the sword of Carl XII (ruled 1697-1718) on a broad sash on his side and, on his head, the tricorne of Carl XI (ruled 1660-97) with a yellow-and-blue cockade.¹

The purpose of this article is to analyze Gustav III's departure to war as a theatrical event and explore the outcomes of theatrical events in the late eighteenth century. I shall place this event in the framework of Nikolai Evreinov's and Yuri Lotman's theories of theatricality, showing how the King applied theatrical means to everyday life in order to theatricalize it, i.e. to make it spectacular and symbolic. By theatricalizing life Gustav III idealized his role of king and thus *performed* his power. Theatricalization of political life not only adorned life but it also significantly changed reality; the theatrical playing of the King entailed real consequences – Gustav III enacted his role of monarch in a memorable way and achieved his political goals. For instance, by

appealing to the image of Gustav Vasa (1523-60) while addressing the peasantry of Dalarna, a province in central Sweden, Gustav III managed to gather militia to protect Gothenburg from the Danes in 1788, during the Russian-Swedish war. By performing his role of the King-protector, he succeeded in introducing a special war-tax during the session of the Parliament in 1789.

The interaction between politics and theater will be the main focus of my article. I shall also explore the poetics of theatrical playing in politics. Obviously the relation between the King-performer and his subjects-spectators was different from the usual actor-spectator relation in the traditional theater. During the communication of the King-performer and his subjects-spectators the political context was of significant importance; the main purpose of such communication was political propaganda and at times, as shown above, the concrete political goals of the King. The communication between the performing King and his subjects did not presuppose the emergence of theatrical fiction as the main goal as in the traditional theater. By theatrical means the King played himself, it was a self-idealization, i.e. the transformation of reality and not the imaginary theatrical world. The interpretation of a theatrical event was required from the subjects when the King performed in front of them. But this event took place in the context of real life, therefore life roles of both the King and his subjects also came into play. Let's consider the King's departure in terms of a theatrical event occurring in real life, but one which likely had its source inspiration in the realm

of Gustav III's explorations within drama.

The King's departure was highly ceremonial. The solemn procession that accompanied the King made its way from the palace to the waterfront. After the halberd carrying troops, the court pages and the state counselors, the King himself paraded at the right hand of the Queen followed by the Crown Prince. Already about ten years old, he accompanied the Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, the wife of the King's brother, Duke Carl, with the courtiers behind them in no particular order. The procession was closed by an innumerable crowd of people of all estates and ages. At the staircase that led to the dock, the King embraced the Queen, the Crown Prince and the Duchess; the members of the Council who stood in line were allowed to kiss the King's hand. Then, Gustav III together with Duke Frederick Adolph, accompanied by a select retinue boarded a waiting sloop. Hearing the greeting acclamations of the crowd, the King stopped the sloop, answered with an emotional hurra, and then sailed to his flagship Amphion anchored at the island of Skeppsholmen. After Gustav III signaled his departure, twenty eight galleys ceremonially passed along the ship; but the Monarch's ship which followed them was delayed till morning because of unfavorable winds. The ships of the Swedish flotilla moored at the islands of Fjäderholmarna not far of Stockholm also had to wait for favorable winds.² Thus, we see that the theatricalized departure of the King was hardly consonant with the conditions of real life. The theatrical playing and the impression from the departure were much more important than reality itself, especially if one takes into account the fact that the Swedish fleet was not ready for war with Russia.

This ceremonial departure of the King was in the spirit of his historical drama where he depicted himself in the images of his predecessors King Gustav I Vasa and King Gustav II Adolph. However the main character of a King in Gustav III's drama was an Enlightened King who was refined and could philosophize like Voltaire's characters.³ Gustav's dramas were connected to the court rituals as they often depicted ceremonial processions and celebrations. The perception of the King by his subjects was always important to Gustav III. In his plays he

emphasized the admiration of the King by his subjects and within the various strata of society. The same admiration the King aspired to receive in real life and therefore he resorted to powerful theatrical means. The ceremonial departure of the King can be compared to the scene from his play *Gustav Vasa* staged as an opera in the Royal Theater in 1786. In the play, after his victory over the Danes and liberation of Stockholm, Gustav Vasa was celebrated by a grandiose procession showed on stage. On June 23 1788, Gustav III resorted to the same theatrical means with the only difference that the world became his stage, his subjects became his actors and the main role was performed by the King himself. This was a characteristic feature of Gustavian theater, following the spirit of the epoch, that easily transgressed the borders of the traditional theater and transformed reality by producing a theatrical event.

The theatrical playing in which Gustav III consciously indulged could be considered as the basis of his daily activities. The theoretical confirmation of this idea can be found in the works of Nikolai Evreinov who contended that theatrical playing is an anthropological and biological function of all living organisms.

In 1908, Nikolai Evreinov, Russian stage director, playwright and theater theorist, introduced the term 'theatricality' (*teatralnost*), which had a wide spectrum of meanings. A ruthless opponent of naturalism in the theater of his time, Evreinov was an apologist of theatricality both in art and in daily life. He has written a great number of books in which he defended his concept of theatricality: *Theater as it is* (*Театр как таковой*) (1912), *Theater for Oneself* (*Театр для себя*) (1915-17), *Theater among Animals* (*Театр у животных*) (1924), *Theatrotherapy* (*Театротерапия*) (1920) among others.

Evreinov detected the rudiments of theatricality in the plant realm and in the behavior of animals. In his chapter "Theater and Nature" (*Театр и природа*) from *Theater among Animals* he writes: "... in this vegetable *masquerade* among the mesembryanthemums we see not only a '*masquerade*', not simply a '*mask*' of some incognito, but a genuine *role* in every one of these unconscious plant-actors, a role of an entirely definite *image*, necessary in the *drama*

of their seemingly unprotected life! This 'drama' is an almost immobile wise *pantomime* in which all the actors by means of their strictly coordinated *playing* attain the effect of a *backdrop*, the *mastery* of which depends not only the pitiful success of the buffoons in a show-booth, but life itself – the very existence of these actors, forced *to represent* a given and not a different 'landscape'!⁴ Evreinov's opinion of the surrounding world is so legitimate from the point of view of the theater that the author does not use any terminology other than that of the theater. Evreinov writes about "the theater of animals" that "the tiger stalks" (his prey) "representing" his absence, rustling "in imitation" of the wind among the thickets in the protective mask of their "nature".⁵

According to Evreinov, human beings are also theatrical creatures.⁶ However, in contrast to animals, the theater of people is seen by Evreinov as consciously transformed reality. One of the basic instincts governing human activities is the "instinct of transfiguration".⁷ In his book *Theater for Oneself* Evreinov gives convincing examples of this instinct. In the chapter "The Demented King" (*Король-безумец*) the author writes about Ludwig II of Bavaria (1864-86) who often gave orders for setting the table for a large number of guests, but stayed alone for dinner. Ludwig entertained his imaginary guests, thus inventing reality and creating "a theater for himself".⁸

Gustav III liked to organize a theater for himself. As, for instance, during the theater season 1775-76 in Gripsholm, the King's residence, Axel Fersen wrote: "H. M. dined often at the theater and, at the end of the performance, the king came to supper with the whole court dressed in his theater costume. So we have seen him dressed up as Rhadamiste, Cinna, and as the high priest of the Temple of Jerusalem; presenting himself as an object of ridicule at his own table."⁹ However, in contrast to Ludwig II of Bavaria, an extreme example of passionate playing in real life, Gustav III was guided first of all by political motives. As a result, Gustav III's playing on stage ended at the insistence of the French ambassador D'Usson who was important because Sweden at that time received heavy subsidies from France.⁹ The King was forced to stop performing on stage, but he never stopped performing in politics

and his passion for theater was fully able to find its outlet there. Although the King performed for his subjects, the fact that his subjects did not always enjoy his playing didn't disturb Gustav III. Such was the case of the part of the nobility who disliked the performing king and considered him a hypocrite.

During Gustav's ceremonial departure to war with Russia, the playing was meant for spectators with the obvious purpose of political propaganda, but at the same time it fulfilled the needs of Gustav III himself, his passion for acting. The theatrical behavior of the King and his clearly expressed "instinct of transfiguration", are illustrated by the following episode from the diary of Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta dated June 1788.

According to Duchess Charlotta, Gustav III invited her and Princess Sofia Albertina to visit him on the ship Amphion when the flotilla, at anchor not far from Stockholm, was waiting for a favorable wind. The party who gathered for dinner made fun of the amusing grey tricorne that was worn by the senior attendant Evert Taube. Taube retorted that an exactly similar tricorne worn by Carl XI was kept in a safe place in Drottningholm. The King expressed the desire to get this headgear as soon as possible and the Duchess promised to send it to him, which she did on the next day. In her own words, Charlotta attached to the tricorne an antique cockade. The King thanked Charlotta in a letter, saying to her that the tricorne would bring him luck. He promised the Duchess he would return the cockade to her after the first glorious victory as was done in the past by the knights who deposited their weapons at the feet of their ladies.¹⁰ It remains unclear why, according to the narrative of Axel Fersen, the King was already wearing the tricorne of Carl XI the day of his departure. Henrika Tanfeld thinks that this might be because Fersen was critical of the King's indolence, wastefulness and fantasies, and thus was inclined to exaggerate as it can often be traced in his observations.¹¹ Thus, one can assume that on the day of the departure, the King was wearing an ordinary tricorne.

Taking into account the fact that Gustav III had received the tricorne of Carl XI after his theatricalized departure emphasizes the predilection of Gustav III for theatricality in his active life. The King

did not stop his theatrical actions even after the event described above, creating theater for himself and inspiring himself by his historical attire.

That courtly playing and theatricality were clearly present in the military campaign of Gustav III is also demonstrated by the following fact: the name of his ship *Amphion* was the name of an opera by Johann Gottlieb Naumann, which was performed on the court stage from 1777 to 1778.¹² *Amphion* was the son of Antiope and Zeus and was famous for playing the lyre so sweetly that he moved stones to erect buildings. On the one hand, theatrical playing in life was the direct continuation of fictional playing on the court scene. However, on the other hand, *Amphion* can also be understood as the allegorical representation of the King as a 'civilizer'; thus Gustav adhered to a widespread tradition for using mythological figures in his state propaganda.

From Evreinov's point of view, theatricality is a means of conduct in society. Theatricality is a hyperbole, a demonstration, the divesting of a means, in other words, a theater that openly declares itself to the world. Evreinov calls everyone to set up a personal theater in ordinary life according to the rules demanded by the prevalent etiquette, profession or standing in society. In the case of Gustav III, he created his theater playing his social role of a king. Therefore, his interest in theater was beyond the personal, it was official and entailed political consequences. Dramas by Gustav III depicting an ideal image of a king were an efficient tool for propaganda. The fact that the King was a very skillful playwright with an eye of a stage director and personal experience of an actor as well as the fact that he actively participated in actors' training and stage design made his plays and theatricalizations of life especially powerful. Obviously, the King knew how to make his spectators become participants of his theatrical actions, which, as a rule, resulted in his political success.

According to Evreinov, one can characterize theatricality during the departure of Gustav III to war as a hyperbola. The King openly theatricalized an event of real life, namely, his real departure to war, showing it in the form of a spectacle inserted into life with the help of such clearly expressed theatrical means as the historical attire of the King, the

symbolic date chosen for the event, and the theatrical behavior of the Monarch when, sailing off in a sloop, he greeted his subjects with a double hurrah. Theatricality was a hyperbola. By playing the leading role in the spectacle, Gustav still respected the court etiquette. He did not depart from his social status, but played his role as a king representing himself in idealized light, thus creating not just his personal theater but also political propaganda.

The presence of the audience is not indispensable for Evreinov's 'actor' who, above all, creates theater for himself; however Evreinov appeals to spectators as shown in the following example.

Once, in his youth, when he was a student at the Institute of Jurisprudence in Saint Petersburg, Evreinov had been locked in solitary confinement as punishment for hooliganism. His friends, in order to support the prisoner, slipped notes under his door. However, Evreinov needed another kind of attention. He was imagining that he was not sitting in a cell behind a closed door, but inside an iron cage, and that the surrounding people could see how he was suffering.¹³

Thus, Evreinov considers the spectator, either a real one or an imaginary figure, as an essential component of his concept of theatricality. The presentation acquires a certain meaning when it is designed for the audience. However, the meaning of theatricality as a result of the interaction between actor and spectators is not included in Evreinov's concept; it is the form of expression that concerns him most, and the form of expression addressed to spectators, present or imaginary, is meaningful as such.

In the case of playing the king, the audience was indispensable. During the theatricalized departure of Gustav III to war, the King's representation was addressed to the beholders, however it did not necessarily require their direct participation, emotional or intellectual. The purpose of this spectacle was to demonstrate the King's power and it was achieved thanks to the theatrical form of expression. Thus in the case of Gustav III, Evreinov's concept needs to be broadened: the aesthetic form of the event was valuable in itself and spoke for itself but it was not entirely a piece of art, it was first of all a political instrument, besides the grandiose spectacle it also produced strong political propaganda.

Yuri Lotman, another theoretician of theatricality with a Russian background, bases his concept on the example of the eighteenth century, which can be relevant for our case.

In his book *Talks about the Russian Culture* (*Беседы о русской культуре*) Lotman reveals the phenomenon that characterizes the period from the second half of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely, noble class imitating art, in other words, the theatricalization of life. Lotman writes that “the boundary between art and everyday life has been destroyed. The theater irrupted into life, actively rearranging the day to day behavior of people. Monologue finds its way in letters, diary and common language. What could look pompous and funny yesterday when it belonged only to the sphere of theatrical space, becomes the norm of speech and everyday behavior [...] There is a large number of examples that show how people in the second half of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century used to fashion their own behavior, everyday language, and in the final count the fate of their life according to literary and theatrical standards”.¹⁵

Lotman sees the theatricalization of life in poses and gestures and in ritual behavior often borrowed from theater and drama. As a convincing illustration Lotman cites the description of the theatricalization of Napoleon’s court life by Mme Genlis. Genlis writes that “one could see in the Tuileries a strange mixture of foreign etiquettes. The court ceremonies were supplemented with much borrowed from the theatrical lore. One witty person noticed at that time that the ceremonial of admission to Court was an exact imitation of the introduction of Eneas to the Carthagian Queen in the opera “Didona”. It is a well known fact that the famous actor [Talma – M. B.] has often been consulted about the design of costumes for festive days”.¹⁶

By considering the fact that Gustav III was an actor, a playwright, and a stage director, it becomes evident that the King used the artifices of theater in his politics. Theatrical elements were present in the war with Russia from the very beginning. According to the Constitution, the King did not have the right to start a war without the consent of the Parliament, so instead he resorted to the following stratagem.

The King staged a provocation on the border: Swedish soldiers dressed as Russian Cossacks attacked the Finnish border post Pumala on the Finnish-Russian border.¹⁷ This was a pretext for Gustav III to engage in ‘defensive’ action. Therefore, the beginning of the war with Russia can already be considered as a kind of theatricalization. Also noteworthy is the fact that the drama of Gustav III, *Siri Brahe*, that extolled Gustav II Adolph was represented with great fanfare in Stockholm in the spring of 1788. This historical drama depicts the manners and politics of the commencement of the reign of Gustav Adolph as Crown Prince; it gives a moral lesson in the spirit of the Enlightenment and presents the King as a great example of true virtue. The intentional staging of the play can be regarded as a prelude for the theatricalization of war with Russia: Gustav III referred to Gustav Adolph in his plays (in 1783 he wrote *Gustav Adolph and Ebba Brahe* and *Magnanimity of Gustav Adolph*) and later in real life, in his theatricalizations of war. Gustav aspired to achieve the greatness and popularity of Gustav Adolph which was one of the reasons why he initiated the war. Thus, in the politics of Gustav III’s theatre, the idealization of the image of the King was presented as a model to be imitated in real life.

In his article, “Poetics of Everyday Behavior in the Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture”, Lotman presents an argumentation about the theatricalization of life. He writes that the conduct of Russian nobility was borrowed from Europe after the reforms of Peter the Great in the seventeenth century. As a consequence, “the Russian nobleman was like a foreigner in his own country”.¹⁸ However, this did not mean that they became foreigners, they just behaved like foreigners by pursuing a life of playing, of constantly feeling as if they were on stage, and of following the borrowed norms of conduct by which they were judged by their contemporaries. In this way, Lotman emphasizes the representative character of the social conduct of the Russian nobility, and that allows the author to speak of the characteristics of theater in day to day life.¹⁹

Speaking of Gustav III during his departure to war, one can say that the theatricalization of the King was based on the model of behavior of one of his predecessors, Gustav II Adolph. Gustav III

chose his symbolic date for his own departure and borrowed his costume. It is hardly plausible that Gustav III who was frail of body could imitate the manners of his model who was a rather stout warrior. However, the historical parallel that was used to build the image of Gustav III was obviously present. This allows us to speak of the representative character of his performance, i.e. of the theatricalization of the King's behavior in Lotman's understanding.

By using the semiotic approach, Lotman constructs a whole system of theatricalization concerning the social behavior of the Russian nobility. He introduces the concept of stock role, i.e., a definite kind of deportment striving to a certain ideal. Lotman gives examples of the most common stock roles used by Russian nobility: *bogatyr*, or legendary hero, miracle-working giant, marvel-hero, the jester, and the buffoon. Another widespread stock role was the Russian Diogenes, or new cynic. A stock role can be compared to a dramatic type in theater performances. In their choice of stock roles the nobility based their conduct on historical and state dignitaries, or literary and theatrical characters. In addition to stock roles Lotman speaks of mask-roles, i.e. certain roles within the stock role. Within one stock role a variety of mask-roles can appear. A mask-role served as the fix point of a plot on which were threaded ever newer episodes of anecdotal life history.²⁰ The number of stock roles was limited, but anyone was allowed to wear several mask-roles in succession. Apart from that, the deportment corresponding to a given stock role under the conditions of real life acquired an improvisational character.

During his departure, Gustav III impersonated a heroic role and followed the historical example of Gustav II Adolph. The heroic role of Gustav III started from the state *coup* of August 19, 1772, which was aimed at the centralization of the King's power. Then, in the course of one day, the King also re-enacted the role of a King-hero by bringing to the memory of his subjects his predecessors, the great Kings Gustav Vasa and Gustav II Adolph which allowed the King to bring the Army to his side and ensure his victory in the state *coup* without bloodshed. An appeal to history was characteristic for the theatricalization of the given epoch and in particular for the representations of the King. Thus, we see

that Gustav III improvised depending on the course of the events. According to Lotman's conception, one can say that Gustav III had several mask-roles within his heroic stock role, Gustav Vasa and Gustav II Adolph were among them. During his departure to war, the heroic stock role of the King was enacted through the mask-role of Gustav II Adolph.

If Evreinov enables us to look at theatrical playing from the anthropological point of view, as the basis of living activities, Lotman helps to give this playing a structure and to look at theatricalization as a symbolic form.

Looking at the theatrical means of the King's performance, it is worthwhile to point out, first of all, the costume of the King. The connection with the past, brought to mind by the historical costume, had already been conceived during Gustav III's coronation on 29 May 1772. During the sumptuous coronation ceremony, the King wore a costume made after the attire of Carl XI; the King's brothers wore costumes that did not belong to any definite epoch. According to Fersen, in order to satisfy the King, who liked everything that reminded of a historical past, the ideas for these costumes were borrowed from a few ancient portraits belonging to three different centuries.²¹ In this way, during the coronation, there was already a display of the theme of knighthood. A theme which was developed considerably during the reign of Gustav III.

Similarly, the King's costume at the time of his departure for war was not an exact copy of the costume of Gustav II Adolph but it was created in close association with it. The references to the kings Carl XI and Carl XII were not as evident, but the accessories were apparently of the kind that inspired Gustav III himself. The costume of the King produced a composite image that referred the current events to Swedish history.

One has also to take into consideration the appearance and manners of Gustav III when he played the role of a king. A preserved pencil drawing by Johan Tobias Sergel, the Gustavian court artist, represents Gustav III on his way to a meeting of Parliament. On the occasion of this solemn event the King wears a mantilla and a crown and holds a scepter in his right hand. His manly profile and his manner of walking speak of determination and

spiritual strength. Gustav III was slightly lame since birth but he had worked out a way of walking that hid this defect.

By all appearances, the countenance of the King could hardly remind one of Gustav II Adolph who was a stocky warrior-king. In contrast, Gustav III was of a rather fragile stature with handsome and fine features, but that did not prevent him arousing in the spectators favorable associations with his predecessors. A Stockholmer, Johan Hjerpe, who described the departure of the King in a diary preserved to this day, gleefully compares Gustav III with Gustav II Adolph, whose exploits, in his words, the people continued to revere.²² According to this witness, one can recognize the great achievement of Gustav III as performer and dramatist: even without having an external resemblance to his predecessor, he could evoke emotional associations with him.

During the King's departure, the historical picture of Stockholm apparently came to the forefront. At the same time, the theatrical element was included. The view of the Royal Palace and the quay was used by Louis Jean Desprez, the Gustavian architect and stage designer, as a decoration in the opera *Gustav Vasa*. The first national opera won the acclaim of the spectators. Therefore, one can surmise that even the city itself, as scenery, brought forth definite associations, both historical and theatrical.

In his book, *Politics as Theater (Politik som teater)*, Ingvar Holm indicates that at definite moments in history the symbolic becomes real. Thus, nobody believed that Napoleon III was Napoleon I when he appeared in the costume of Bonaparte and imitated his way of conduct. But the situation needed a hero and thus the symbolic was perceived as real, people eventually believed in Napoleon III.²³

The same is true of the image of Gustav III when the people saw the parallel between him and the Great Gustav II Adolph. Despite the fact that people were commanded onto the streets and even paid for waving flags, the theatricalization of life reached its goal by presenting the events of war as a spectacle. Thus, Gustav III attained his objectives. Thanks to his theatricalized departure to war, his spectators' behavior and not necessarily their true perceptions were such that Gustav III appeared from the begin-

ning as a victor marching on to military success. The theatricalization of life, according to Lotman, attached the symbolic meaning to life; it transformed it and by making it spectacular, made it meaningful.

Frederick Axel von Fersen, who had a critical attitude toward the King, has also left the following observation. He wrote in his memoirs that the joy of the people and the "hurrahs" during the departure of Gustav III were due to the fact that significant amounts of money had been distributed among the people. While the King was boarding the ship, he dropped his cockade and was utterly frightened by it. According to Fersen, the small incident, which was rapidly dealt with, was taken as a bad omen.²⁴

It is hard to evaluate the veracity of the memoirs of the King's contemporaries. In addition, the perception of the beholders and the attitude of the contemporaries did not, in fact, have a large significance on the event. According to Evreinov's theory, the theatricalization of Gustav III spoke for itself. It was a manifestation of the royal power, and the reactions of beholders could not markedly influence the course of events. Such a manifestation of power, as distinct from the traditional theater, did not require the intellectual and emotional participation of the spectators and their significant interpretation of the theatrical event. The parallel with Gustav II Adolph was obvious; it was the same hyperbola, the same open device described by Evreinov. The display of Gustav III was directed to the beholders, but because of its nature, it was monological and did not demand a sharing of feelings with the beholders. People were called to take part in the theatricalization of the King as beholders in the same way as they could have been asked to play the role of extras. Gustav III's theatricalization was very similar to the 'Potemkin's villages' (*Potyomkinskiye derevni*) of Catherine the Great that became known all over Europe.

The Potemkin's villages were arranged by the minister, Grigory Potemkin, during Catherine the Great's journey to the Crimea in 1787. At the time, the country was in deep decline because of the war with Turkey, but all the Empress was allowed to see during her trip was fairyland décor of blossoming villages, bedecked with flowery garlands and triumphal arches, and groups of peasants and city dwellers

who greeted the sovereign of the prosperous Empire in festive attire, merry and dancing. The Austrian Emperor Joseph II, who accompanied Catherine II, called this journey “a hallucination”.²⁵

The royal ship slowly sailed the Dnieper to the Black Sea, while the people, rushing to the shore, greeted ‘Mother-Empress’ with cries of joy. The flotilla consisted of six red and gold pleasure ships which were followed by seventy-three smaller crafts. The Empress was dressed in a feminine adaptation of the uniform of the Preobrajensky regiment, introduced by Peter I in 1720; she wore the same green uniform with golden decorations during the state *coup* of 1762 and at her meeting with Gustav III in Fredrikshamn in 1783.²⁶ Even in her choice of costume, Catherine II did her best to emphasize, not so much the blood relationship, but her spiritual relationship with Peter I. Just like Gustav III, Catherine the Great theatricalized the historical succession, her relationship with the greatest Tsar among her predecessors and also closeness to the people who seemed to love their Empress so much. The form of the theatricalization of Catherine II, its symbolic meaning and the participation of the people in it, resembled the theatricalized departure of Gustav III to war. The display was a manifestation of the imperial power and pure political propaganda.

The Russian Empress herself reacted to the theatricalized departure of Gustav III in the following way: upon learning about the staged departure of Gustav III to war, she wrote, on July 7 1788, to Joseph II rather ironically that she had heard that Gustav III, dressed up in the attire and armor of Gustav II Adolph, had invaded her lands.²⁷ The irony of Catherine II did not stop at that. Catherine II, who, just like her Swedish cousin, was also a playwright, wrote the comedy *Woeful Knight Kosometovich (Горьбогатырь-Косометович)* in which it was not difficult to recognize a political pamphlet on Gustav III. The play was immediately converted into a comical opera with music by Vicente Martín y Soler and staged at the Hermitage Court Theater (January 1789). In the play, inspired by Russian folklore that appealed to the Empress, the *Woeful Knight* decided, out of boredom, to set off for heroic deeds dressed in an armor made of cardboard, painted to look like iron, and in a cotton

bonnet adorned with feathers of many colors. As soon as he left his estate, the wind blew his bonnet off and threw it in the mud. The *Woeful Knight’s* travel continued in the same vein and ended in utter disaster, but with some success.²⁸

The comedy of Catherine II became a theatrical interpretation of the theatricalized departure of Gustav III to war, as it comically represented the playing spirit of the Swedish King. Soon after the performance was staged, Catherine II ordered the opera to be moved from the Hermitage Theater to the private theater of Nikolai Sheremetev in Moscow because she felt that such a spectacle was not proper in the presence of foreign ministers.²⁹

The poetics of playing in the case of a theatrical performance at the Hermitage Court Theater differed from the poetics of theatricalization of life by the two monarchs. The poetics of theatrical playing in the politics of Gustav III and that of Catherine the Great consisted in using theatrical means not to create an imaginary subject and imaginary personages, but to create the real role of a king/empress. The goal was not the creation of a fictional world but the creation of political propaganda, which to a certain extent has a relation with fiction but is real in its consequences. In spite of the artificial form of Gustav’s departure to the war, its result was entirely real – the King reinforced his power to a significant extent and raised his popularity among the people by appearing to them as a hero-warrior. What was important from the point of view of the perception of the beholders in the frame of the political theatricalization of Gustav III was the collective impression, rather than the individual impression of spectators, their emotional and cognitive reactions, which are so important in the traditional theater. The function of the beholders during Gustav’s departure to war was belittled as they did not have any impact on the representation. Some spectators, as for instance Catherine the Great, were not even physically present during the action. Retroactively, the interpretation by the spectators could assume any form and even be critical as it was with Catherine II and the Swedish aristocracy. However, this did not influence the essence of the event in any way; Gustav was represented as a great King. The Russian-Swedish war did not bring victory to either

Russia or Sweden, it ended with the Treaty of Värälä on August 14, 1790. Nevertheless, as a result of this war, Gustav's popularity among the simple folk (not the nobility) was enhanced significantly and he was perceived as a King-liberator. Obviously, theatricalization of the King's role was an important part of this success.

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