

## ON FESTIVUS APPLAUSUS AND CAMENA BOREA<sup>†</sup>

Hans Helander<sup>\*</sup>

The two literary works I am going to treat now were published when Swedenborg was 27 years old. They are both intimately connected with the fateful events of the Great Northern War, which had then, around 1715, been raging for 15 years. It can indeed be argued that they are impossible to understand if certain occurrences in the war are not taken into consideration, especially those events that are part of the personal history of the Swedish King, Charles XII. For King Charles is the principal character in both works (although in quite different ways, as we shall see). It will therefore be wise to start this address with a short summary of the main course of events of the war, up to 1715, concentrating on the King's person and on the Swedish aspects, as this is what Swedenborg does.

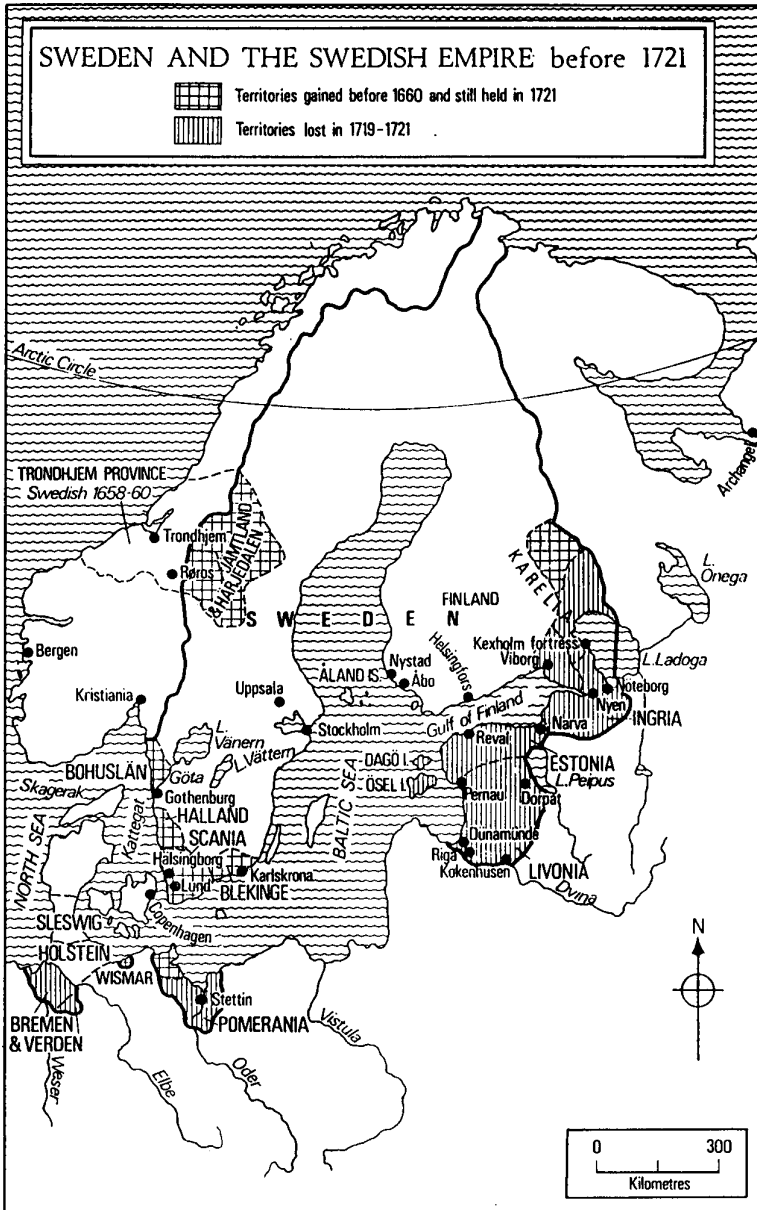
Charles XII had succeeded his father as king at the age of 14, in 1697. A strong adherence to the state religion, orthodox Lutheranism, and a firm belief in his divine mission as a king by the grace of God were characteristic features of the young prince.

In the spring of the year 1700 the anti-Swedish coalition opened hostilities: in February Augustus II, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, attacked Riga in Livonia. Denmark invaded Schleswig-Holstein in March, and in August the Russians crossed the frontier of Ingria. This was the dramatic beginning of the Great Northern War, which was to last until 1721. The Swedish military campaigns that followed this year were extremely successful. Denmark was forced to a humiliating peace and in the battle of Narva (in November 1700) the numerically vastly superior Russian forces were put to rout. In 1701 Charles crossed the Düna and defeated the army of Augustus II. The aim of the long Polish campaign that followed was the dethronization of Augustus II; in his place Stanislaus Leszczyński was to be elected king of Poland. Stanislaus was actually

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<sup>†</sup>Prof. Hans Helander of Uppsala University, Department of Classical Philology, delivered this presentation in July, 1990, at Starbo, Swedenborg's summer estate, to the second "Swedenborg's Sweden" Tour group led by Dr. and Mrs. J. Durban Odhner and Miss Martha Gyllenhaal. (See the article on Starbo in *The New Philosophy*, July-September 1988, p. 629.)

<sup>\*</sup>Address for reprints: Uppsala University, Department of Classical Philology, Box 513, S-751 20, Uppsala, Sweden.



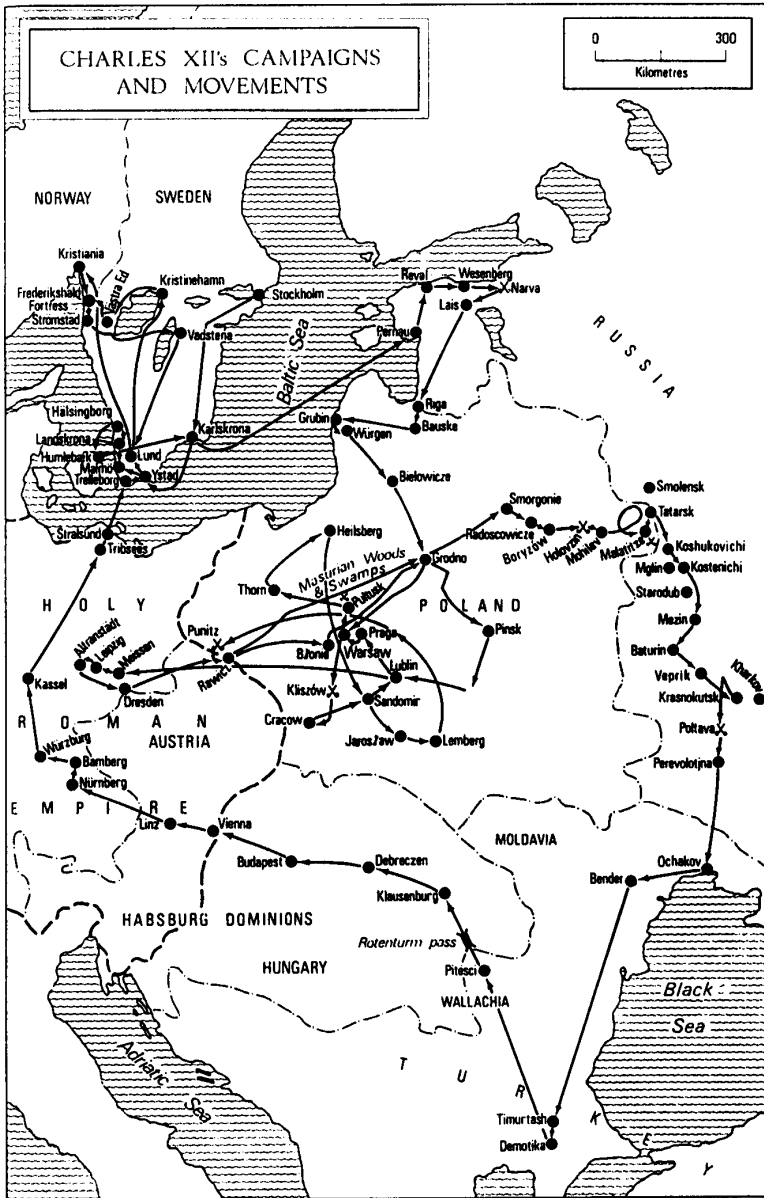
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crowned, as will be remembered, in 1705, and in 1706 Augustus II renounced his claim to the Polish crown.

Now at the height of his power Charles XII decided to march against Russia. The Russian campaign ended in a total catastrophe. For while Charles had been occupied in the affairs of Poland, Czar Peter had reorganized his army and strengthened his positions. The Swedish army was forced by energetic and ruthless Russian resistance to turn south from its planned route to Moscow. And in June 1709 the Swedish forces suffered a disastrous defeat at Pollava in the Ukraine. The army that had marched with the king from Saxony did no longer exist; and Charles escaped with a small escort to Turkish held territory. In August 1709 he took up his abode in Bender in Bessarabia. His stay in Turkey was to last for five years. The main purpose of his endeavors while staying in these exotic regions was to make Turkey undertake a large-scale war against Russia together with a supporting Swedish army. As it became more and more evident that there would be no Swedish troops for the purpose, Charles's position had become rather precarious.

It must be remembered that during the King's absence Sweden's position had become catastrophic; almost all transbaltic provinces had been lost to the enemies. In February 1713 the small Swedish garrison in Turkey was attacked by the Turks in the famous *kalabalik*. The King was kept as prisoner until September 1714, when the political situation seemed to be suitable for his return. At the end of October 1714 he left Pitesci in Wallachia, in disguise, accompanied first by two, then by only one follower. In 14 days he covered, mostly in the saddle, the distance to Stralsund in Swedish Pomerania, where he arrived on the night of October 11. The King's return was in itself considered to be a very important event. The heroic manner in which the exploit was carried out made the whole thing a sensation of the first order.

Shortly before the King's return to Stralsund a young Swedish student had arrived in Swedish Pomerania after five years absence from his native country. His name was Emanuel Swedberg. (A few years later he was to change his name to Swedenborg, when the family was ennobled in 1719.) The years of his peregrination had been devoted to extremely serious and purposeful studies in various sciences, first in England and then in Holland and France. With great diligence he had acquired information about



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the latest discoveries and experiences in the various fields of physics and astronomy. And he had spared no pains in trying to learn about the progress recently made in the field of mechanics. On his way home he stopped for a while in Greifswald in order to have some of his Latin manuscripts printed. These works that he wanted to publish now did not, however, deal with science or mechanics: one of them was a collection of Latin poems (*Ludus Heliconius*) and the other a book of allegorical fables, also in Latin, which he had been working on for a couple of years during his peregrination. The title of this latter work is *Camena Borea*, i. e. "The Northern Muse," and I shall return to this remarkable book presently.

However, when Swedenborg was occupied with these preparations, there came news from Stralsund, which is situated only a few miles from Greifswald, that Charles XII had suddenly and in a sensational manner arrived at the walls of that city in the middle of the night of November the 11th. Not long after the King's arrival young Emanuel joined the chorus of eulogists by writing and publishing a panegyric with the stately title *Festivus applausus in Caroli XII Phoenicis Gentis Veteris Gothicae et Septentrionis nostri Monarchae in Pomeraniam suam adventum* (A festal plaudit on the return of Charles XII, the Phoenix of the old Gothic nation and the King of our North, to his own Pomerania). This short work comprises 28 pages in octavo. Its contents can be summarized, quite briefly, as follows:

The Pythagorean philosophers believed, says Swedenborg, that there is a cyclic pattern, a cyclic development in everything, not only in the movement of the celestial bodies, and in the changes of the seasons on earth, but also in the course of human history. Thus they thought that the heroes of their own times were reincarnations of the great heroes of the Past. We have, in our days, says Swedenborg, reason to remember these ancient ideas. Let us just think of the old Gothic nations and their glorious history, how they invaded various countries in southern Europe and how they won for themselves eternal glory. Now, if we consider the deeds of our most powerful King Charles, is it not then quite evident that in him the glory of the old Gothic warriors has been reborn, that in his person all the Martial fame and splendor of the old Swedes has been reborn, like, as it were, Phoenix from the ashes? In addition, is it not obvious that it must have been the magnificent plan of Heaven and of Fate that Charles should be brought, through the various vicissitudes of his military career, to the

very places where his ancestors, the Goths, had won their great victories, that is to the land of the Greeks and the Trojans, and to Thracia! Thrace, then, was the ultimate goal of the glorious path of the King, according to Swedenborg. (What Swedenborg refers to is of course the Turkish, or Ottoman Empire. To use that designation for the Turkish Empire, that is to call the Turks "Thracians," is not, by the way, so far-fetched as it may seem. Let me only mention that one of the most prominent of all Neo-Latin writers, Matthias Casimirus Sarbievius (1595-1640), known as "the Polish Horace," in his poems repeatedly calls the Turks "Thracians" (the Ottoman armies, e. g., go by the name of *Thracum copiae*).

When Charles XII reached Thrace he was almost alone, says Swedenborg. (The factual background referred to is of course the King's flight, with a small escort, after the defeat of Poltava.) But at once he compelled various nations of Asia and Africa to serve the Swedish colors; this he achieved by means of the authority of his name, which made the peoples of the Orient eagerly strive to join his army. (The factual events here referred to by Swedenborg are those of the Turko-Russian war of 1710-1711, which was in part the result of Swedish diplomatic endeavors.) Swedenborg then passes to the famous *kalabalik*, the skirmish at Bender, in which the King was taken prisoner by the Turks. A very important and on the whole dominating tendency in Swedenborg's style in *Festivus applausus* is the principle of "Classical orientation," which leads to a quite strong avoidance of all unclassical expressions and names. (That he calls the Turks *Thraces*, which I mentioned earlier, is of course a good example of this endeavor to create the "purely Classical flavor"; and this is a well known tendency in almost all Neo-Latin authors.) In accordance with this general stylistic ideal, Swedenborg describes the *kalabalik* as the heroic struggle of the King against the evil forces of Hades and Tartara, against Furies and infernal spirits. The historic events have been converted into scenes from ancient mythology: *Hinc subito flamma et Erinys gensque in facinus jurata per totam domum regnabat.*

Then follows the description of the King's return to Stralsund. Finally the King decided, says Swedenborg, to leave these infidel and bewitched regions, and the author here compares Charles to Ulysses and the Turkish Sultan to Circe. The King, with his sole companion, rides swifter than winged Rumor, and the aged Danuvius, the river God, raises his head

from his billows in order to greet the Hero, but too late, for Charles has already passed. A lunar eclipse and various celestial miracles bear witness to the significance of the great event and also signify in an incontestable way the approval of the Gods.

After this description of the King's ride there follows a detailed comparison with the great heroes of Classical mythology. Charles is compared with Hercules, with Theseus and with Aeneas, and Swedenborg demonstrates that there are close parallels, or why not correspondences, between the fate of the Swedish ruler and the lives of these semi-gods of the Past. (Especially in the case of Aeneas, Swedenborg succeeds in creating ingenious analogies.)

These are, then, the contents of *Festivus applausus*, in a very short summary. It is in several ways a typical product of the panegyric genre, a devout laudatory work belonging to the type of occasional literature that was then, during the days of absolute Kingdom by the Grace of God, flourishing and thriving as never before. The enthusiasm and the hyperboles belong to the fundamental features of this literary genre, and it is easy to quote close parallels from contemporary writers.

Yet—there *are* features of this little work that must be regarded as personal, as typically Swedenborgian and as reflections of the interests and ideas that occupied young Emanuel.

The opening passage itself, with its analogies, or correspondences, between the movements of the celestial bodies, the seasons, the lives of men and the course of human history must be regarded as eminently representative of Swedenborg's basic outlook. It is easy to quote parallels from other, more mature works by Swedenborg. I want to mention—just to adduce one single example—that the famous prose poem on the creation of the worlds called *De cultu et amore Dei* (from 1745) contains an opening passage with some principal reflections that are almost identical.

It may of course be argued, in this connection, that analogies of this kind are typical of baroque literature in general. The thought that all phenomena in Nature “correspond,” internally as well as with patterns in a spiritual world, was in 1714 still more or less self-evident—not only cherished by the poets, but underlying the basic assumptions and beliefs of people in general. And I think that Swedenborg's general conception of life, his basic modes of thought, exhibit features that are in a very high

degree representative of central and vital aspects of the "baroque" outlook on life. And I shall return to this point in some concluding remarks at the end of this paper.

Another motif in *Festivus applausus* that ought to be regarded as "Swedenborgian" is the author's obvious interest in cyclic processes and typological patterns ("the fates of men and nations repeatedly return"). This is an idea that may be found in many of the works Swedenborg wrote during the decade that followed upon his return to his native country.

And we should not disregard the occurrence in *Festivus applausus* of another main idea in Swedenborg's writings, namely the myth of the Ages of the World. Throughout his life Swedenborg believed in a great Golden Age, when man, being in direct contact with the Divine power, was nobler and wiser than in our times. This idea of a Past characterized by wisdom and innocence, when mankind enjoyed an everlasting spring in the blessings of unhampered celestial influence, this motif recurs repeatedly in Swedenborg's writings, often in a beautiful mythological garb. As late as in *De amore conjugiali* (from 1769) we meet the motif of the four Ages and the decline of happiness and wisdom.

The version of this important classical myth that Swedenborg knew best was undoubtedly the one found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This brings us to another important feature in *Festivus applausus*, namely the influence from Ovid. It is well known that young Emanuel's study of the *Metamorphoses* had been important for his choice of motifs in *Camena Borea* and *Ludus Heliconius* as well as in the mature *De cultu et amore Dei* (which was printed in 1745). That this is so has been clearly demonstrated by Inge Jonsson in his study of *De cultu et amore Dei*. And the examination of *Festivus Applausus* which I have undertaken reveals that the overwhelming majority of classical quotations and allusions are from Ovid, and almost all of them from the *Metamorphoses*. It is indeed a striking piece of evidence of how deeply the early study of Ovid's poetry had influenced the mind of the young author.

Quite generally I would characterize the style of the little panegyric work as highly poetic; but I shall return to that feature of the work later.

To sum up—there is much in *Festivus applausus* that is Swedenborgian, features that may be interpreted as signs of his future development. It is not misleading, I think, to say that by using the motifs I have mentioned



when composing *Festivus applausus* Swedenborg has in a way converted his panegyric into a treatise on some ideas that fascinated him.

It is for a modern reader quite natural to ask the question: What was Swedenborg's real opinion of the great warrior King of Sweden? What were his views on the form of government (i. e. the autocratic model) and the way the war was carried out? As a matter of fact, there is important information concerning these matters to be found in the other work that I am going to talk about, namely *Camena Borea*. For *Camena Borea* (The Northern Muse) is an allegorical work that reveals interesting truths to those who are able to interpret the code.

*Camena Borea* comprises 102 pages in octavo (the work is consequently about three times longer than *Festivus applausus*). It contains 22 different chapters, or fables. Its full title is *Camena Borea cum Heroum et Heroïdum factis ludens, sive Fabellae Ovidianis similes*, that is "The Northern Muse, jesting with the deeds of Heroes and Heroines, or Fables like those of Ovid." I shall give some examples of the content, and I shall also make an attempt at interpreting the hidden sense of these texts. We may be quite sure that there *is* such a hidden sense and also that the concealed message is of a *political* nature, for Swedenborg has mentioned these fables in a letter to a relative (Eric Benzelius the younger) the year before they were printed, and he there states "[the work that I am going to send to the printers] consists of tales similar to those of Ovid, under the allegorical cover of which I have hidden everything that has been done in Europe during the past 14 or 15 years so that it might thus be possible to joke quite freely with serious things and to sport with heroes and with men of our own country."

It is a remarkable and bewildering fact that before my edition, which appeared in 1988, practically nothing had been written about *Camena Borea*.

Let me now give some examples of the allegorical tales: In many of the fables the principal part is played by Leon or Leo, the Lion. Among other things we get to know that the Lion has escaped from his enemies and that he has fled away to a distant land under an alien sun, leaving the Lioness behind. As the enemies of the Lion see the Lioness left alone, they all attack her, catch her and humiliate her by the most abominable torture. At last they kill the poor animal and put her on the funeral pyre. But then, when

the fire starts burning, there emerges from the pyre a *ram (Aries)*, who at once attacks the enemies of the Lioness, thus taking revenge on them for the murder they have committed. The evil-doers take flight, some of them are killed, and it is especially mentioned that one of the enemies, called *Dolydanes* would have been slaughtered on the spot, had not *Thetys*, the Goddess of the Sea, saved him. *Aries*, the ram, then continues his victorious expedition of revenge: among other things he kills a nymph called *Latonis*. Swedenborg says that he sacrifices her.

Now it is not difficult to understand the *sensus internus*, the "inner significance," of this fable. (I cannot refrain from reminding you that *sensus internus* is the term used by Swedenborg himself during the theosophic period to refer to the inner, "spiritual" and "celestial" meaning that he assumed was hidden behind the literal sense of the Bible, behind its *sensus externus*.) The Lion is clearly Charles XII, and the Lioness is Sweden. The distant land under an alien sun is Turkey. (In *Festivus applausus* Swedenborg uses exactly the same phrases as the ones quoted about the King's stay in the Ottoman Empire.) The attack on the Lioness is then of course the victorious enemy advance into Swedish territory during the King's long absence. *Aries*, the avenger of the Lion's glory, must be the Swedish general Magnus Stenbock. (Stenbock, which in Swedish means stone buck, could of course have been translated into Latin as *Capricornus*, but this would have been too obvious and easy; I suppose that is why Swedenborg has used the name *Aries* instead, thus ingeniously and wittily, quite in the tradition of Baroque style, substituting one sign of the Zodiac for another.) Stenbock's first great achievement during the King's absence in Turkey was the victory over the Danes that had invaded Scania in 1709. The remnants of the Danish army were carried back by the invasion fleet after the defeat in February 1710. This, of course, is the meaning of the words about *Dolydanes* who is rescued by the Goddess of the Sea. (*Dolydanes* must be interpreted as "the sly Dane"). The historical facts behind the rest of the story are that Magnus Stenbock went with his army to Germany, where, among other things, he burnt down the city of Altona outside Hamburg (in 1713). This is "the sacrifice of the nymph *Latonis*" in Swedenborg's text; *Latonis* refers to *Altona*.. This is, by the way, just one of the many cases in *Camena Borea*, where Swedenborg has used the anagrammatic method of creating the names he needs.

But what is the Lion doing in the distant country where he is dwelling? Swedenborg says that he is favored by the ruler of this land, a woman by the name of Circe, who loves him deeply. But the Lion has dangerous rivals. One of these, whose name is Tarticanes, tries to drive the Lion away, and in order to get rid of his rival the evil Tarticanes steals the magic rod of the sorceress Circe and conjures up all the abominable forces of Hades, among them the Furies, whom he sends away against the Lion. All his attempts are in vain, however, and finally he is punished by Circe for his evil designs.

All this is quite easy to understand: Circe, the sorceress, is the Ottoman Sultan, who keeps Charles from returning, exactly as the Homeric Circe tries to prevent Ulysses from returning home. Tarticanes is the Tartar Khan of the Crimea, who took part in the Turkish attack on the King in Bender. (The famous skirmish that was called the *kalabalik*, which I spoke of earlier.) (The name itself is not even an anagram, just a slight distortion of *Ta(r)tar Khan*.) It is noticeable that many phrases and expressions in the description of this event in *Camena Borea* are almost identical with those that Swedenborg has used in depicting the same event in *Festivus applausus*.

In another fable Swedenborg tells us a strange and partly bewildering story of Orpheus. We get to know that Orpheus has returned from Hades, from Tartara. He is now looking for Eurydice who has also lately received permission to leave the Kingdom of Death. But Orpheus has lost his memory and he wanders around in his former land, in Thrace, not knowing exactly who he is and what he is doing there. The whole story has the strange character of a nightmare. Poor Orpheus is several times attacked by various mythological creatures, but finally he meets his Eurydice. But he has forgotten that he was told, on leaving Hades, that if he was ever to join with Eurydice again, they would both, according to the stern decree of the Kingdom of Death, fall back into Hades again. Forgetful of this law, the two lovers fall into each others arms when they meet, and at once they both fall down into Hades again.

In this story, Orpheus must be Charles XII. Swedenborg has seen several common features, or correspondences, in their respective Fates. One obvious analogy is of course the land of Thrace, where both were dwelling (according to the Neo-Latin identification of the ancient *Thracia*

with the Ottoman Empire that I mentioned before). Another parallel that must have been evident enough to a mind that was formed under the impression of the Baroque literary tradition lies in the sense of the name *Tartara*, which refers to Hades, of course, but which is in Neo-Latin often used to refer to the Tartar peoples (often with the connotation of something dark, hideous and frightening). The relations between Charles XII and the Crimean Tartars, as well as his long stay in Turkey had fascinated other composers of Latin panegyrics too. I have seen several eulogies and poems written during the King's stay in Turkey in which the authors compare Charles to one who has descended into Tartara, to the Realm of Death; and the authors usually end with an expression of their hope that the King may, as soon as possible, stand up again from the dead. Charles is Orpheus, as I said, and it is quite obvious that Eurydice is Sweden. The detail in this fable that is most interesting, however, is the description of the fateful reunion of Orpheus and Eurydice. Their meeting means ruin and destruction to both of them.

Is this an indication of Swedenborg's real attitude towards the King and his policy? I think that the answer must be affirmative. During his travels abroad, which coincided with some of the worst calamities that befell Sweden during the war, Swedenborg had access to all important news about the Great Northern War. He was extremely well informed; and he must have been well aware that the opposition against the autocratic form of government and the way the war was carried out was growing stronger all the time; as a matter of fact Eric Benzelius the younger, his brother-in-law, with whom he exchanged many letters during his peregrinations, was a prominent representative of the anti-autocratic opposition. In circles like these, the opinion that the King's return would mean disaster must have been quite common. As a matter of fact, many people in Sweden were probably waiting, and eagerly praying, for the news of his death in the land of the infidels.

This analysis of Swedenborg's innermost thoughts can be corroborated by other tales in *Camena Borea*. In one of the fables we are told that Leon has fallen down from Mount Olympus, struck by the bolt of Jupiter. And his realm is no longer a place for the Muses; it has become a theatre of war, where poetry and songs are silenced and drowned in the rolling of drums and blaring of trumpets. In another fable Swedenborg says that

Leon is seeking glory only for himself, without caring for the people that are dependent on him for their welfare.

Before I leave the subject of Swedenborg's attitude to Charles XII, I ought to mention that young Emanuel was to meet the King about two years after the latter's return from Turkey. It was in December 1716, in Scania; the young scientist found favor in the King's eyes and he was entrusted with important commissions. On meeting Charles, Swedenborg, like most other people, was obviously impressed with the King's character and his mental qualities.

And it should also be remembered that Charles XII plays an important role in Swedenborg's dreams and visions during the theosophic period, that is, more than thirty years after *Festivus applausus* and *Camena Borea*. In the so-called *Diarium spirituale* (now called *Experientiae Spirituales*), which starts with the year 1745, Charles is frequently mentioned. He is said to have been governed by a boundless lust for power. His pride was enormous; he considered himself to be a god. After death he tries to be Lord of Hell and to crush all his enemies. The central role attributed to Charles in the spiritual world must of course be viewed as a reflection of the strong impression the warrior King had left on the mind of the young scientist and future philosopher. □

