

A Fragment of the History from William Rufus

TO THE COUNT DE GYLLENBORG

Historical Introduction

Count Carl Gyllenborg (1670-1746), to whom Swift addressed this draft dedication, had been secretary of legation to the Swedish ambassador in London, Christoffer Leijoncrona, and succeeded in office upon the envoy's death in April 1710.¹ He is twice mentioned in the *Journal to Stella* as an acquaintance, "the Swedish Envoy,"² and later twice in the *Correspondence*, both in terms suggesting that Swift had lost touch with him by 1714. In a letter of 19 June 1725 to the Revd James Stopford, who was about to embark for a tour of the Continent, the Dean tells his young protégé, "I have been so long out of the World that I have lost all my forein Acquaintance." Among the lost acquaintance, he expressly mentioned "the Count de Gillinborg," who "may perhaps be an Ambassad^r somewhere in y^r way."³ Swift had come to know Gyllenborg as a man of cultured tastes, whose political career was to lead him to high office after his return to Sweden. The Count's arrest, in January 1717, for purported complicity in a Jacobite plot and in breach of what was then international law,⁴ by the British government and the seizure of his papers were given full publicity in the press and in Parliament.⁵ He was

¹ *The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, ed. David Nichol Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 75n1.

² *Journal to Stella*, ed. Williams, II, 637 (13 March 1713), 650 (1 April 1713).

³ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 289 and 557.

⁴ John J. Murray, "The Görtz-Gyllenborg Arrests - A Problem in Diplomatic Immunity," *The Journal of Modern History*, 28 (1956), 325-37 (pp. 327-28).

⁵ See, in addition to Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Swift's History of England," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 51 (1952), 177-185 [182-85], Ragnhild Hatton, *Diplomatic Relations between Great Britain and the Dutch Republic, 1714-1721* (London: The Anglo-Netherlands Society, 1950), pp. 147-49; Paul S. Fritz, *The English Ministers and Jacobitism between the Rebellions of 1715 and 1745* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 8-27; Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England, 1689-1727* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 400-1.

released soon after and repatriated in August 1717, significantly “without the King of *Sweden* so much as offering any excuse to the King of *England*.”⁶ The seized letters, to and from Swedish diplomats at The Hague and in Paris, concerned loans of money from Jacobite sources to aid Charles XII in his policies in Northern Europe, threatening some Hanoverian territories,⁷ and they were given wide circulation in a government White Paper in 1717, in folio and quarto printings, issued by ministerial authority in English, French, German, and Dutch, and including three editions published in Dublin.⁸ Since there was no real prospect of the Swedes aiding the Jacobite cause materially, however, the plot may have been used by the new English ministry of Stanhope and Sunderland as a diversionary tactic.⁹

At the beginning of 1719, Swift tried to enlist Ford’s help in resuming the relationship. In a letter of 6 January, he asked his friend: “Pray can you let me know how I could write to the Count of Gillenburg.”¹⁰ It is tempting to correlate the two dates – 6 January, the date of the letter to Ford, and 2 November 1719, the date of the letter “To the Count De Gyllenborg – but

⁶ M. de Voltaire, *The History of Charles XII, King of Sweden: Translated from the French*, 3rd ed. (London: C. Davis and A. Lyon, 1732), pp. 349-54 (354).

⁷ See J. F. Chance, “The ‘Swedish Plot’ of 1716-7,” *English Historical Review*, 18 (1903), 81-106; John J. Murray, “Sweden and the Jacobites in 1716,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 8 (1944-45), 259-76; Romney Sedgwick, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1715-1754* (London: The History of Parliament Trust, 1970), I, 513-14.

⁸ See *Letters which Passed between Count Gyllenborg, the Barons Gortz, Sparre, and Others: Relating to the Design of Raising a Rebellion in His Majesty’s Dominions, to be Supported by a Force from Sweden* (Dublin: Tho. Hume, 1717). If Swift saw any edition of these *Letters*, he is likely to have seen, in 1717, one of the three Dublin reprints rather than the original London publications (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 238n7).

⁹ See, in addition to Chance, “The ‘Swedish Plot’ of 1716-7,” pp. 100-5, George Hilton Jones, *The Main Stream of Jacobitism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 125-29; Ragnhild Hatton, *George I, Elector and King* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 199, 218-21; see also the same author’s *Charles XII of Sweden* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), pp. 438-39.

¹⁰ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 289.

any assumption that the Dean's attempt to secure the Count's current address was made in an effort to apprise him of Swift's intention to dedicate the *History of England* to him, as a testimonial of his "regard and friendship" (p. 2, ll. 26-27), is bound to be misleading. For one thing, given the "unfinished and inconsequential" state of the draft,¹¹ the Dean never seems to have followed up on his design. For another, in his letter of 19 June 1725 to Stopford, Swift reiterated his request for Gyllenborg's address, this time specifying his desire: "I would be glad to write to him, upon an *Affair* wherein he promised to inform me."¹² What this "Affair" on which the Dean wished to be informed in 1725 was is unknown. But whatever it was, retrospectively, the "Affair," not the dedication, is likely to have been the subject of discussion in 1719, thus supplying the true reason for Swift's eagerness to resume contact with Gyllenborg. At some later stage, however, he dismissed the idea altogether, and as a result, his 'dedicatory' letter was only published as late as 1 March 1768, more than twenty years after Swift's death.

¹¹ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 289n11.

¹² *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 557-58 and n.