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Chapter 12

French fashions: Aspects of elite lifestyle in eighteenth-century Sweden

Johanna Ilmakunnas

In eighteenth-century Sweden, the lifestyle of elites was strongly influenced by France and French culture. Indeed, it has been argued that French cosmopolitan culture dominated elite lifestyles throughout eighteenth-century Europe.¹ However, the paradigm of a French Europe has been significantly nuanced by recent scholarship, which stresses the multiculturalism of the eighteenth century.² Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire argues that, contrary to what has been affirmed in previous research, Europe did not assimilate to France, but acculturated, negotiated and enriched French influences in local conditions.³ In Sweden, French influences were especially visible amongst the aristocracy and titled nobility, who considered France as another cultural fatherland. This influence spanned from education and the use of French language in social occasions and correspondence; military and diplomatic careers in France; styles of clothing, architecture and interior decorations; commissioning luxury goods from Paris, and employing French servants.

Charlotta Wolff stresses the significance of political alliance between Sweden and France, and Swedish aristocrats' personal interest in France, French language and French culture as key factors in forming close connections between the two countries.⁴ Many Swedish aristocrats spent years in

1 Classic studies on French 'radiance' in Europe include Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation de l'Europe des Lumières* (Paris: B. Arthaud, 1971); René Pomeau, *L'Europe des Lumières: Cosmopolitisme et unité européenne au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1966); Louis Réau, *L'Europe française au siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 1938).

2 *Multilinguisme et multiculturalité dans l'Europe des Lumières – Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Enlightenment Europe: Actes du Séminaire international des jeunes dix-huitémistes 2004 – Proceedings of the International Seminar for Young Eighteenth-Century Scholars 2004*, ed. Ursula Haskins Gonthier & Alain Sandrier (Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 2007).

3 Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *Le mythe de l'Europe française au XVIII^e siècle: Diplomatie, culture et sociabilités au temps des Lumières* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2007), 7–8; see also Kerry Bristol's, Alida Clemente's, Kristof Fatsar's, Nadia Fernandez de Pinedo & Corinne Thépaut-Cabasse's and Michael North's chapters in this volume.

4 Charlotta Wolff, 'L'aristocratie suédoise et la France dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle', *Histoire, économie & société* 29 (2010), 56–67; Charlotta Wolff, 'The Swedish Aristocracy and the French Enlightenment circa 1740–1780,' *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30 (2005), 259–270, doi:10.1080/03468750500279632.

France, living in between two cultures, transferring and adjusting French cultural codes to their own use while in France and elsewhere in Europe, as well as when returning to Sweden.⁵ The lifestyle and consumption of French aristocracy were the ideal image of tasteful, elegant and fashionable lifestyle.⁶ However, while the lifestyle and consumption of the French aristocracy were the ideal image of tasteful, elegant and fashionable lifestyle, admiration of France and French culture was not uncritical. Swedish aristocrats were conscious of tensions that consumption of French luxuries and adaptation of French culture created in Sweden: it was a necessity for maintaining a certain lifestyle, but it was also considered morally and economically problematic.⁷ Furthermore, Swedish aristocrats travelled throughout Europe, bringing back to Sweden influences from Italy, the German states, Holland and England. For mercantile elites connections to and thus influences from the last three were more important than France or Italy.⁸ Artists, craftsmen and architects studied in France, but also in Italy and Holland, transferring and accommodating their influences to the Swedish context. Therefore, albeit dominant and widely diffused, French fashions, taste and luxuries were not exclusive aspects of aristocratic lifestyle in eighteenth-century Sweden.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, luxury was vehemently debated in Sweden, as elsewhere in Europe. However, in Sweden the debate concentrated more on the middling sorts than the elites, worrying the effect of opulence and luxury on social order, which would be disrupted by unnecessary luxury consumption.⁹ Concern over luxury amongst middling sorts characterises luxury debates in many countries, whereas a certain level of luxury was expected, and thus accepted, from the aristocracy in the *ancien régime* court society, where the outer appearance manifested rank, respectability and reliability of individuals. Even though luxury was a necessity for aristocratic lifestyle, it eludes exact definitions, and its drifting connotations made it difficult to

5 See e.g. Elisabet Hammar, *'La Française': Mille et une façon d'apprendre le français en Suède avant 1807* (Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1991); Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'The Luxury Shopping Experience of the Swedish Aristocracy in Eighteenth-Century Paris', in *Luxury and Gender in European Towns, 1700–1914*, ed. Deborah Simonton, Marjo Kaartinen & Anne Montenach (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 116–7; Johanna Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmissigt liv: Familjen von Fersens livsstil på 1700-talet* (Helsingfors & Stockholm: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland & Atlantis, 2012); Marie-Christine Skucke, 'Un prince suédois auteur français: L'éducation de Gustave III, 1756–1762', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 296 (Voltaire Foundation, Oxford, 1992), 123–63; Charlotta Wolff, *Vänskap och makt: Den svenska politiska eliten och upplysningstidens Frankrike* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2005)

6 Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmissigt liv*.

7 Ilmakunnas, 'The Luxury Shopping Experience'; Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmissigt liv*, passim; Wolff, *Vänskap och makt*, passim.

8 See Ulla Ijäs's chapter in this volume.

9 Karin Hassan Jansson, 'When Sweden Harboured Idlers: Gender and Luxury in Public Debates, c. 1760–1830', in *Sweden in the Eighteenth-Century World: Provincial Cosmopolitans*, ed. Göran Rydén (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Leif Runefelt, *Att hasta mot undergången: Anspråk, flyktighet, förställning i debatten om konsumtion i Sverige 1730–1830* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2015).

define for contemporaries. Count Hans Axel von Fersen epitomized the essence of aristocratic lifestyle, taste and luxury, when he wrote to his father about his expensive purchase of horses and bridles in 1779: ‘I wish neither to shine, nor to be ridiculous, I only wish to be decent’.¹⁰

In Sweden, as elsewhere, luxury debates included a critique of the Frenchified aristocracy and elites’ travels to France. Luxury was also criticized by aristocrats who themselves had close connections to France.¹¹ Their argument was not to ban luxury altogether, but to restrict the ostentatious display of luxury, which was considered tasteless and non-noble. A certain level of luxury and French fashions was vital for elite lifestyle and acted as a positive status symbol. However, flamboyant and conspicuous luxury consumption turned against the aristocracy, evoking negative perceptions.

This chapter offers new readings of luxury and taste amongst aristocracy in eighteenth-century Sweden. It explores different aspects of the aristocratic lifestyle, thus creating a more nuanced understanding of the variety of French influences in Sweden. It focuses on three key areas: clothing and outer appearance, strongly influenced by French fashion across Europe; genre paintings, demonstrations of their collector’s taste, but also visualizations of aristocratic lifestyle, taste and material culture; and the employment of French servants, most importantly governesses and cooks. These influences, whether cultural or political, were primarily distributed to Sweden by Swedish diplomats, officers, architects and artists who had close connections to France. Swedish elites were connected through family relations, kinship and friendship, and the ties between those who had sojourned in France were remarkably strong, easing the flow of information, influences and goods. This chapter therefore draws mainly on elite correspondence and genre paintings, as well as objects such as clothes in museum collections, but account books of elite families also have been examined for information on French servants.

Clothing and outer appearance

In eighteenth-century court culture clothing and outer appearance were key to elite respectability.

10 Hans Axel von Fersen to Axel von Fersen 29 June 1779. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv vol. 8. Stafsundsarkivet, Riksarkivet, Stockholm (henceforth RA). ‘je Veux point briller, ni etre ridicule, je Veux seulement etre decemment.’

11 Wolff, *Vänskap och makt*, 301–7.

For Swedish elites Paris was the iconic shopping venue, from where luxury goods, amongst them clothes and accessories, were steadily bought either on location or by proxy.¹² Meanwhile, the Swedish state tried, through sumptuary legislation, to reduce the consumption of foreign (chiefly French) luxury and fashion goods, which were regarded as morally corrupting and harmful for the national economy. However, the benefits of the fashion industry for boosting the economy were acknowledged and the state strongly favoured domestic production.¹³ In making the garments the elites commissioned, Swedish tailors and seamstresses followed French fashions, occasionally using materials imported or smuggled from France and Italy.¹⁴ In 1778, Gustav III established a national uniform, which broke the hegemony of French clothing fashion and evoked both praise and criticism.¹⁵ Despite the elites' awareness of the argued negative impact of foreign luxury trade on the Swedish economy, the aristocrats were less inclined to follow the official politics of favouring domestic production than were the lesser nobility and the mercantile and administrative elites.

Swedish diplomats sent from Paris to Sweden suits and gowns, lavish fabrics, ribbons and laces, swords, walking sticks and snuffboxes, fans, gloves and toiletries. Two suits that the then envoy, Count Gustav Philip Creutz, commissioned for Crown Prince Gustaf of Sweden, from 1772 Gustav III, in 1766 and in 1777 are illustrative of French luxury clothing commissions to Sweden. Their acquisition is well documented in diplomatic correspondence and as objects.¹⁶ In Sweden, the future king's attire acted as a model for French taste and exclusivity in clothes. Moreover, commissioning the suits gave Creutz an occasion to display in France the exquisite taste of Swedish royalty. The suit from 1766 was displayed in Paris before being shipped to Sweden, and it evoked wide admiration amongst French political elites who called on the Swedish envoy in order to see it.¹⁷ Much of the admiration of Paris society fell on Creutz, whose taste in elegant clothing had guided

12 Ilmakunnas, 'The Luxury Shopping Experience'.

13 Marjatta Rahikainen & Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen, 'Manlig och kvinnlig lyx: Överflödsförordningar och modeartiklar', in *Det svenska begäret: Sekler av lyxkonsumtion*, red. Paula von Wachenfeldt & Klas Nyberg (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2015); Carolina Brown, 'Den vita lyxen: Spetsar i 1700-talets visuella och materiella kultur', in *Det svenska begäret: Sekler av lyxkonsumtion*, red. Paula von Wachenfeldt & Klas Nyberg (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2015), 76.

14 Riitta Pylkkänen, *Kaksi pukuhistoriallista tutkielmaa. I: Miehen muotipuku Suomessa 1700-luvulla* (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 1984); Riitta Pylkkänen, *Säätyläisnaisten pukeutuminen Suomessa 1700-luvulla* (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 1982); Pernilla Rasmussen, *Skräddaren, sömmerskan och modet: Arbetsmetoder och arbetsindelning i tillverkningen av kvinnlig dräkt 1770–1830* (Stockholm: Nordiska museet, 2010).

15 On the Swedish national dress, see Lena Rangström, *Kläder för tid och evighet: Gustaf III sedd genom sina dräkter* (Stockholm: Livrustkammaren, 1997), 165–77; Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715–1789* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 196–201.

16 Rangström, *Kläder för tid och evighet*, 65–75, 155–63.

17 Gustav Philip Creutz to Crown Prince Gustaf, 19 August 1766, in *Le Comte de Creutz, Lettres inédites de Paris, 1766–1770*, éd. Marianne Molander (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1987), 36–38.

the commissioning of the crown prince's garments from Parisian merchants.

Scholars have in innumerable studies stressed the importance of appearance in *ancien régime* court societies.¹⁸ Clothing was an essential part of politeness and sociability, distinguishing the aristocracy from other elite groups and sovereigns from their subjects.¹⁹ Although women and their consuming passions were often criticized and caricatured, men's clothing was at least as luxurious.²⁰ This is visible in the wardrobes of Swedish aristocrats. Hans Axel von Fersen's taste, judging from his diaries and correspondence with his father, was expensive and fashionable. In the 1780s he socialized in Paris and Versailles in the same circles as ambassador Creutz and was a close friend of Queen Marie-Antoinette. Also from the 1780s dates a richly embroidered silk suit that Fersen wore in Paris.²¹ The coat is made of grey and blue striped silk, with roses, leaves and small flowers embroidered in ivory, green, yellow and rose tones. The ivory waistcoat is embroidered with similar patterns to the coat, whereas the breeches are unadorned black silk. The relative simplicity of the suit and its new-modelled frock-coat, which was adapted from England, accentuated in a fashionable way Fersen's lean figure. Exquisite, high-quality and bright-coloured embroidery highlights the simplicity and elegance of the suit. In Parisian high society and at the court in Versailles, it was more effective for a Swedish nobleman to distinguish himself through simplicity than through lavish appearance, since French aristocrats would always be higher-ranking and richer than any Swedish aristocrat.

Those aristocrats who did not have the opportunity to buy luxury goods themselves in France, had to trust on the refinement of their peers' taste, as did royals, who – as we have already seen – entrusted diplomats to acquire French luxuries to them. Detailed instructions were given and received, as in 1743 when Baroness Charlotta Sparre, while commissioning gloves, stockings and jewellery, advised the then Swedish envoy, Count Clas Ekeblad, to ask for help in shopping from Marquise de Broglie, because she was 'a person who [has] good taste'.²² Hans Axel von Fersen

18 See e.g. Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, *Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015); Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*; Daniel Roche, *La culture des apparences: Une histoire du vêtement XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

19 See Bernard Hours, *Louis XV et sa cour: Le roi, l'étiquette et le courtisan* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 39–40.

20 Roche, *La culture des apparences*, 98–9, 134–40, 177–93.

21 A man's suit, coat and waistcoat of embroidered silk, made in France c. 1785. Belonged to Hans Axel von Fersen. NMA 0052207, NM 0154745A-C, Nordiska museet, Stockholm. <https://digitaltmuseum.se/011013849815?query=fersen&pos=8&count=28>; <https://digitaltmuseum.se/legacy/S-NM/NM.0154745A-C>.

22 Charlotta Sparre to Clas Ekeblad, undated letter, f. 14–5. E 3564 Ekebladiska samlingen, RA. 'une personne de bon gout.'

took care of a number of luxury commissions on the behalf of his parents, Axel von Fersen and Hedvig De la Gardie.²³ In 1774, while in Wismar, Northern Germany, Hedvig De la Gardie commissioned dresses from Paris. She opened the boxes to examine whether the gowns were as desired, but found that her purchases were a disappointment: ‘I do not find them [the dresses] being of the taste so much sought after, the spring grey dress is not at all as I commissioned it, and it is of most ugly cloth.’²⁴ The famous French taste represented for Hedvig De la Gardie the desirable quality of fashionable attire, but reality did not always meet the expectations of the commissioner.

Paintings as luxury objects and transmitters of French fashions

Art and books have long been considered as part of the eighteenth-century world of consumption and luxury.²⁵ Art collections, natural history collections or collections of books and rare manuscripts were an essential part of elite lifestyle and display of taste and knowledge,²⁶ and were bought or commissioned from across Europe. Nevertheless, it would be too simplistic to argue that the influences travelled primarily to one direction.²⁷ For instance, Swedish-born artists Gustaf Lundberg and Alexander Roslin made influential careers in mid-eighteenth century Paris, while the artist Elias Martin was similarly successful in English art markets in the late eighteenth century, before they all in their turn returned to Sweden, continuing their careers there.²⁸

While paintings can be read as representations of cultural values and norms, they can also be analysed as representations of elite culture and lifestyle. Moreover, paintings can be seen – and certainly were seen by contemporaries – not only as works of art, but also as a luxury commodity,

23 Ilmakunnas, ‘Luxury Shopping Experience’.

24 Hedvig De la Gardie to Axel von Fersen 2 June 1774, 6 June 1774. Axel von Fersen d. ä.:s arkiv vol. 7. Stafsundsarkivet, RA. ‘je ne Les trouve pas d’un gout fort recherché, La Robe grise de printen, n’est pas du tout telle que je La demandois, et elle est d’une trai vilaine etoffe.’

25 *Women and Material Culture, 1660–1830*, ed. Jennie Batchelor & Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham & John Brewer (London: Routledge, 1995); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).

26 Beth Fowkes Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells: Natural History Collecting in the Age of Cook’s Voyages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Merit Laine, ‘En Minerva för vår Nord’: *Lovisa Ulrika som samlare, uppdragsgivare och byggherre* (Stockholm: [Merit Laine], 1998).

27 Cf. Charlotta Wolff’s argument on how the Swedish diplomats actively participated the cosmopolitan intellectual sociability in the salons in Paris, instead of merely transmitting ideas of French Enlightenment to Sweden. Wolff, ‘The Swedish Aristocracy and the French Enlightenment’.

28 Mikael Ahlund, *Landskapets röster: Studier i Elias Martins bildvärld* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2011); Merit Laine & Carolina Brown, *Gustaf Lundberg 1695–1786: En porträttmålare och hans tid* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2006); *Alexander Roslin*, red. Magnus Olausson (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2007).

which could be commissioned, distributed and consumed, and which had a negotiable price. In genre paintings artists did not depict the everyday life and interiors of European elites as they were in reality, but rather created an illusion: an image of cultivated, gracious and comfortable lifestyle. Thus elite interiors in genre paintings by François Boucher, Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Nicolas Lancret and Jean-François de Troy, among others, are very much metaphors of French luxury and the comfort of urban leisured milieus. The wealthy urban elites also represented one of the most important groups of buyers of these paintings.

One of the collectors and patrons of contemporary French artists was Count Carl Gustaf Tessin, Swedish ambassador in Paris 1739–1742. Patron of Boucher, Chardin and Lancret, Tessin was a well-known connoisseur of contemporary art in Paris. He bought art for his own collections and for royal collections in Sweden.²⁹ His taste for the material and intellectual delights of everyday life, his generosity, and his knowledge of French court society and French contemporary art made him invaluable as a transmitter of French aristocratic lifestyle to Sweden.

Two paintings, one by François Boucher, painted in the 1740s and another by Pehr Hilleström, painted in the 1770s or 1780s, with the same motive, a milliner and her female customer, visualize and concretize French taste and luxury, French influences in and their adaptation to Sweden.

François Boucher signed *The Milliner (La marchande des Modes)* or *Morning* in 1746 (Figure 12.1).³⁰ An elegant and fashionable woman clad in a powdering mantel sits by her dressing table, examining a green ribbon; the milliner, just as fashionably clothed is seated by an open box of ribbons, holding a linen cap in her hand. The room is furnished and decorated after the latest fashion and, through a large window on left, morning light falls on the women, their faces and dresses. The theme and subject of the painting came from the commissioner, the Crown Princess of Sweden Lovisa Ulrika, sister of Frederic II of Prussia, who was the most important collector of contemporary French art in Sweden, along with Carl Gustaf Tessin.³¹ *The Milliner* was to be first of

29 *Carl Gustaf Tessin och porträttkonsten* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1995); Pontus Grate, *French Paintings II: Eighteenth Century* (Stockholm: Swedish National Art Museum, 1994), *passim*; Jan Heidner, 'Carl Gustaf Tessin – en samlare och konstförmedlare', in *Carl Gustaf Tessin: Kulturpersonen och privatmannen, 1695–1770* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1995), 21–40; Patrik Reuterswärd, 'Aveds Tessinporträtt', in *Carl Gustaf Tessin: Kulturpersonen och privatmannen, 1695–1770* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1995), 57–74.

30 François Boucher, *The Milliner (Morning)*, 1746. Oil on canvas, 64 x 53 cm. NM 772, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.
<http://collection.nationalmuseum.se/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=17775&viewType=detailView>

31 Merit Laine, '*En Minerva för vår Nord*': *Lovisa Ulrika som samlare, uppdragsgivare och byggherre* (Stockholm, 1998); Paula Rea Radisich, 'Lovisa Ulrike of Sweden, Chardin and Enlightened Despotism', in *Women, Art and the*

four genre paintings, depicting the four moments and typical feminine occupations of the day. Through Tessin and Swedish envoy Carl Fredric Scheffer, the princess gave detailed instructions to Boucher on what she wished the painting to depict.³² This underlines Lovisa Ulrika as a self-confident consumer of French luxury goods, among them art and paintings as objects. However, Boucher waited months before painting *The Milliner* and never executed the other three, although in April 1750 Scheffer was still reporting that Boucher intended to deliver the missing three paintings as soon as possible. The reasons why Boucher did not fulfil the commission are not revealed by the extensive diplomatic correspondence recording the commission and its partial execution,³³ but it caused a rift between the painter and his former patron and friend Tessin.³⁴

In eighteenth-century Paris, the morning toilette, as depicted in ideal and fictional form by Boucher, was an essential element of urban elites' sociability.³⁵ The habit diffused throughout Europe to the highest echelons of society. In Stockholm it was a widespread mode of the aristocratic lifestyle.³⁶ The morning toilette represented female leisure and consumption of luxury goods. Furthermore, the woman and the milliner are fashioned as luxury objects themselves. A milliner on a morning call to a customer is the very embodiment of luxury trade in eighteenth-century Paris.³⁷ Even though the three other commissioned paintings were never executed, Boucher's *Milliner* alone was a significant demonstration of French taste for luxury transplanted to Sweden, where it was added to

Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe, ed. Melissa Hyde & Jennifer Milam (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 46–63.

32 *Carl Fredrik Scheffer: Lettres particulières à Carl Gustaf Tessin 1744–1752*, éd. Jan Heidner, Stockholm: Kungl. Samfundet för utgivande av handskrifter rörande Skandinaviens historia vol. 7, 1982), 103–4, 120, 122, 124–5, 132, 144, 154, 176–7, 200, 212, 214, 216, 253–4.

33 The history behind the painting is well known, documented and explored by art historians and historians. See e.g. Colin B. Bailey, 'François Boucher, *The Milliner (Morning)*', in *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, ed. Colin B. Bailey (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 226; Colin B. Bailey, 'Surveying Genre in Eighteenth-Century French Painting', in *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, ed. Colin B. Bailey (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 14–5; Ilmakunnas, 'Adelsdamen som konsument på 1700-talet', 89 (2004) *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 117–34; Alastair Laing, 'Catalogue des peintures, La marchande de modes (Le matin)', *François Boucher 1703–1770*, dir. Alastair Laing, J. Patrice Marandel & Pierre Rosenberg (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1986), 226–30.

34 Laing, 'La marchande de modes (Le matin)', 228.

35 Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, 'Dressing to Impress: The Morning Toilette and the Fabrication of Femininity', in *Paris: Life & Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Charissa Bremer-David (Los Angeles: The Paul J. Getty Museum, 2011), 53–73.

36 Carolina Brown Ahlund, 'Mode och skönhet', in *Signums svenska kulturhistoria: Gustavianska tiden*, red. Jacob Christensson (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Signum, 2007), 401, 406; Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 266–8.

37 On luxury trade in eighteenth-century Paris, see e.g. Natacha Coquery, *L'Hôtel aristocratique: Le marché du luxe à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998); Natacha Coquery, *Tenir boutique à Paris au XVIII^e siècle: Luxe et demi-luxe* (Paris: CTHS histoire, 2011); Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2004); *Luxury Trades and Consumerism in Ancien Régime Paris: Studies in the History of the Skilled Workforce*, ed. Robert Fox & Anthony Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchand Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996).

the collections of Lovisa Ulrika and to be seen by Swedish aristocracy and courtiers.

A Swedish counterpart and adaptation of Boucher's *Milliner* is Pehr Hilleström's painting, also called *The Milliner (Modehandlerska)*, painted in the 1770s or 1780s (Figure 12.2).³⁸ The central figure is a woman, sitting by a table while examining semi-luxuries presented to her by a milliner, who stands by the table. The woman holds in her hand a straw hat, while the milliner presents feathers for decorating it. Only one candle lights the room and the faces of the two women. Whereas Boucher's painting bathes in morning light, Hilleström examines in his the light of one candle and its reflections on the women, their clothes and in the gildings which decorate the room. The women's clothes are more unpretentious than the silk gowns worn in Boucher's painting and the colourings of these two paintings are different. Hilleström uses soft blues in the dress of the customer and the ribbon on her cap and temperate greenish grey tones for the interior of the room. Whereas in Boucher's painting, the strong morning light irradiates bright reds, greens and blacks. Examining the light of a single candle was typical for Hilleström and his small scale candle-lit interiors were sought-after paintings in Swedish art markets, always finding eager customers wanting them to decorate their salons and drawing rooms.³⁹

The two *Milliners* by a French and a Swedish painter, some thirty years apart, offer us a French and a Swedish visual interpretation of a small-scale, but important luxury trade. Boucher's *Milliner* is unquestionably a French rococo painting, visualizing an opulent luxury trade, whereas Hilleström's *Milliner* is equally unquestionably a Swedish version of luxury markets. Hilleström adapted the theme to less lavish Swedish interiors and clothing. Moreover, and more importantly, Hilleström also used artistic means he himself was interested in, artificial light and its reflections in an interior. Presumably Hilleström, who was appointed as royal painter in 1776, knew Boucher's painting, in the collections of the then Dowager Queen Lovisa Ulrika. Moreover, in 1757 Hilleström, who began his artistic career as a weaver, studied weaving techniques at the Royal Gobelin's Manufactory, headed by Boucher. Boucher invited Hilleström to study painting in his atelier at the Royal Academy of Art, which gave Hilleström an impulse to aspire as a painter, an ambition which

38 Pehr Hilleström, *The Milliner*. Oil on canvas, 79,5 x 65,5 cm. NM 3382, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.
<http://collection.nationalmuseum.se/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=20435&viewType=detailView>

39 On light in Hilleström's paintings, see Mikael Ahlund, *Att se vardagen: 1700-talet i blickpunkten* (Helsingfors: Konstmuseet Sinebrychoff, 2014), 56, 60, 62–75; On Hilleström on the Swedish art market, see Mikael Ahlund, 'Konsten att försörja sig som konstnär: Pehr Hilleström och konstmarknaden i 1700-talets Stockholm', in *Kulturens finansiering i Stockholm 1750–1850*, red. Klas Nyberg (forthcoming 2016).

bore fruit in the 1770s.⁴⁰

Mikael Ahlund argues that, in eighteenth-century art markets individual collectors, patrons, customers and broader audiences of art all had an impact on shaping of the subjects of paintings.⁴¹ While Boucher's production, clientèle and reception has been mapped,⁴² more research is needed to form a broader picture of who commissioned and bought paintings from Pehr Hilleström, apart from his work as Royal painter. However, judging from Hilleström's enormous productivity and his notes on selling his paintings, it is clear that his genre paintings, which adapted French ideals to Swedish art, had no problem finding buyers. Also, and more importantly, Hilleström created an expression of his own in his small paintings.⁴³

Both Boucher's and Hilleström's works are linked to luxury, taste, consumption and the distribution of French cultural trends outside the borders of France in multiple ways. As paintings, they were at the same time artefacts, images and metaphors of French luxury, or rather French fashion and luxury adapted to Sweden. Through commissions and detailed instructions to the artists, aristocratic patrons were active consumers of luxury artefacts such as art works. In their turn, the paintings represented and pictured French luxury goods, material culture and everyday comfort. Furthermore, paintings existed in a physical space and place: an elite home or a royal residence. For their viewers, the paintings depicted the life lived in the spaces in which the paintings were hung. In eighteenth-century Sweden, architecture and interior designs were French, or French ideals adapted to Swedish context,⁴⁴ bringing paintings and domestic interiors into a dialogue which spoke of the complex relations between luxury objects, visual representations of luxury and national taste.

French servants

40 Ibid., 32–3.

41 Ahlund, *Landskapets röster*, 9, 174–239.

42 See, e.g. Melissa Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and his critics* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006); *Rethinking Boucher*, ed. Melissa Hyde & Mark Ledbury (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006)

43 Gösta Selling, *Att se vardagen*; Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'Naisten työt ja arkielämä Pehr Hilleströmin maalauksissa 1770-luvulta 1810-luvulle,' *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 113 (2015), 339–60.

44 Gösta Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem under 1700-talet* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1937); Rose-Marie Söderström, *Bostadskultur, informationsflöden och hantverkare 1740–1820 med utgångspunkt i Bålby (Närke) och Skottsbergsgården (Blekinge)* (Lund: Sekel, 2009); Bo Vahlne, *Frihetstidens inredningar på Stockholms Slott: Om bekvämlighetens och skönhetens nivåer* (Stockholm: Balkong 2012); Anne-Sophie Michel, 'Une communauté d'artistes et d'artisans français à l'étranger: Le cas des sculpteurs au château royal de Stockholm au XVIII^e siècle,' *Sjuttonhundratalet: Nordic Yearbook of Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12 (2015), 117–31. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.7557/4.3528>.

Servants were key agents in maintaining aristocratic lifestyle. The significance of servants for elites' lifestyle lay particularly in three fields: the number of servants employed in a household, the education of servants and the nationality or language skills of the servants. Well-educated servants such as cooks or governesses were high-ranking in the hierarchy of the household. A French cook was an ultimate proof for the aristocratic taste and comfort in everyday life, while a French-speaking governess was regarded as a necessity in the most aristocratic circles. Indeed, French-speaking governesses were iconic for the European elites' home education well into the twentieth century. Governesses were vital both in terms of educating the children to francophone cultural norms and as status symbols.⁴⁵ In eighteenth-century Sweden, sumptuary legislation regulated the employment of foreign tutors and governesses.⁴⁶ At the Diet (*riksdag*) of 1765–6 the nobility as an estate opposed the prohibition and fees for employing foreign governesses, tutors and language teachers. Axel von Fersen, one of the representatives of the nobility in the Diet, defended the nobility's right to employ foreign tutors and governesses, arguing that those who wished their children to learn foreign languages should not be punished by any fees or regulations.⁴⁷ Being able freely study foreign languages at home (for boys also at the university), taught by native speakers, was at the very core of elite lifestyle and ideals of cosmopolitan European elite education.

In the 1760s, Carl von Fersen and Charlotta Sparre's five daughters were instructed by the French woman, Mademoiselle Liegeon. After the von Fersen girls had completed their education and entered high society, Mademoiselle Liegeon made a notable career in the theatre as one of the most admired actresses at the Swedish court.⁴⁸ In the 1750s and 1760s, Carl von Fersen's sister-in-law, Hedvig De la Gardie had a French maid, Barbe Hassé, who taught French and other feminine accomplishments to the von Fersen children.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in the 1760s, Axel von Fersen and Hedvig De la Gardie employed a governess, Mademoiselle Domér, whose yearly salary was 900 silver *dalers*, equivalent to middle-ranking civil servants and thus significant proof of her high status amongst the household staff. Significantly, there is no mention in the von Fersens' account books of any fines being paid for employing a foreign governess.⁵⁰ It is possible that these were

45 Hammar, *'La Française'*.

46 Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 68.

47 *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll från och med år 1719*, vol. 24–6 (1765–66). (Stockholm: P. A. Nordstedt & söner, 1958–1960), 412–3.

48 Hammar, *'La Française.'* *Mille et une façons d'apprendre le français en Suède avant 1807*. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1991), 19; Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 68, 433n120.

49 Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 313–4.

50 Axel von Fersen's account books 1762–3. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv vol. 41–2. Stafsundsarkivet, RA.

never charged, because the nobility was often exempted from indirect fees and taxes, in addition to direct ones, such as tithe and state taxation. Nonetheless, it is important to note that governesses were employed despite possible taxes or fines and relatively high salaries. Equally important is the fact that, despite the sources noting ‘French’ governesses, the majority of the governesses and tutors, even in the most high-ranking aristocratic families, were neither foreign nor French. One of the most important reasons for this was religion. For the Swedish Lutheran aristocracy, employing a Catholic governess was problematic,⁵¹ yet they were willing to pay substantial sums in order to employ French-speaking governesses, who played a key role in educating children about French culture and language. Probably the French governesses the von Fersen family employed were French Huguenots or the attributions ‘French’ and ‘Mademoiselle’ in the account books simply refer to their language skills, not to their origin.

French cooks and Swedish cooks educated in France were also essential for the elite lifestyle. They were responsible for everyday comfort and a pleasant life in terms of culinary pleasures in elite households. Moreover, cooks created gastronomic experiences for festivities, banquets and intimate dinner parties, essential for elite sociability. Several Swedish aristocrats either employed a French cook or sent their Swedish cooks to France to learn French gastronomy and cooking. Again, Swedish envoys in France played a key role, offering the members of Swedish elites the opportunity to send their cooks to be apprenticed in France.

In early-modern diplomacy, the display of wealth and taste through gastronomy, silver plate and festivities was vital for envoys, because a country’s diplomatic and political power was weighted according to its diplomats’ socializing and the meals he offered.⁵² Consequently, Swedish diplomats in France employed a French cook while in France and often brought him to Sweden after their assignment in France was completed. In August 1741, envoy Carl Gustaf Tessin wrote from Paris to his wife Ulla Sparre in Sweden: ‘I tried to find a cook, which is, as you know, the most difficult thing in the world. Especially presently, when everyone needs one for their country [houses].’⁵³ At the end of September 1741 Tessin could write that he had found a cook, who would travel to Sweden and work for the Tessins. The cook had been earlier employed by Count de La Marck,

51 On Swedish aristocracy and Catholicism, see Wolff, *Vänskap och makt*, 288–94.

52 On how Swedish envoys entertained in Paris, see Wolff, *Vänskap och makt*, 129–39.

53 *Tableaux de Paris et la cour de France 1739–1742. Lettres inédites de Carl Gustaf, comte de Tessin*, éd. par Gunnar von Proschwitz (Paris: Jean Touzot, 1983), 192. ‘Je verrai a trouver un Cuisinier, c’est comme vous savés, la chose du monde la plus difficile, surtout a present, que chaqu’un en a besoin pour sa Campagne.’

French ambassador in Madrid.⁵⁴ In April 1741 Tessin's niece Charlotta Sparre reported that the cook had arrived to Sweden together with furniture, books and paintings that Tessin had sent home from Paris. She wrote that the cook was the politest man in the world, even though he wanted to rearrange the whole kitchen from floor to ceiling. However, the cook's gastronomic skills were praised by the polite society Countess Tessin had invited for dinner.⁵⁵ A cook's experience from other aristocratic and elite houses was an important recommendation. Tessin knew personally Count de La Marck, who had been French ambassador in Stockholm 1717–19. Thus the name of the de La Marck and the cook's employment in his household acted as an extra assurance of the cook's skills in the eyes of Tessin.

In the early 1770s, Count Axel von Fersen and Count Erik Sparre af Söfdeborg sent their cooks to Paris, their progress being reported back to Sweden by envoy Gustav Philip Creutz. The cooks stayed at the Swedish residence, where Creutz's butler supervised their education. Fersen's cook, Eric Lindgren, prepared, alongside of the staff at the diplomatic residence, dishes for feasts given by Creutz. He stayed almost two years in Paris, before his skills in gastronomy were polished to perfection.⁵⁶ After returning home, both cooks created exquisite meals for the guests of their masters, as was the custom in Stockholm high society. For instance, right after his arrival in Sweden in 1776, Count Hans Henrik von Liewen's French chef cooked a festive meal which was given for the king, queen and courtiers.⁵⁷

In 1776 Axel von Fersen sent another cook to Paris and again it was Creutz who organized the apprenticeship. The cook was first sent to a confectioner and then served in Creutz's kitchen. Later Creutz sent him to the kitchen of Princess de Guéménée, whose chef was regarded as one of the best in Paris. The cook's apprenticeship cost to von Fersen 800 *livres* a year, into which subsistence for accommodation and food was added. Creutz's good connections to French aristocracy and possibly also the connections Axel von Fersen himself had created while in France in the 1730s and 1740s, not only opened the doors to the kitchens of Mme de Guéménée but did so in October instead of the customary January.⁵⁸ The dominance of French gastronomic culture among the Swedish aristocracy was not complete, however: two years later, the same cook travelled to

54 Ibid., 215.

55 Charlotta Sparre to Carl Gustaf Tessin 30 April 1742. Autografsamlingen vol. 196. Eriksbergarkivet, RA.

56 Gustav Philip Creutz to Axel von Fersen 8 September 1771, 14 October 1771. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv vol. 7. Stafsundsarkivet, RA.

57 Ehrensvärd, Gustaf Johan, *Dagboksanteckningar förda vid Gustaf III:s hof*, vol. I, ed. E. V. Montan (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, 1877), 9.

58 Gustav Philip Creutz to Axel von Fersen 30 June 1776. G 360. Uppsala universitetsbibliotek.

England, where the Swedish envoy in London, Baron Gustav Adam von Nolcken, found him an appointment at an English aristocratic house, where his skills were honed further.⁵⁹

Indeed, not all foreign cooks in Sweden were French. In December 1740, the future admiral Carl Tersmeden, when returning to Stockholm after years in Germany, Portugal, Holland and England, brought with him a Portuguese servant named Le Clou. ‘Born French, raised Portuguese, hairdresser and cook in profession, has been with me since August 1734’,⁶⁰ explained Tersmeden to his astonished family, listening to Tersmeden and Le Clou discuss in Portuguese. Tersmeden explained to his sister that, whether she wished her hair fashioned after the latest English style or her meals prepared after English or French fashion, Le Clou would do all that. Again, both French and British fashions were adapted and shaped into Swedish context. The culinary skills of Le Clou were widely admired in Stockholm society and several members of the Tersmeden family borrowed him to cook while they gave dinner parties where they wished either to impress their peers or let them taste refined gastronomy and enjoy the pleasures of life.⁶¹

Conclusion

The three aspects through which this chapter has explored the aristocratic lifestyle in eighteenth-century Sweden stress the importance of French taste. In many ways ‘French taste’ was a construction, an adaptation of a variety of features regarded as French by the Swedish aristocracy, transplanted and shaped to a Swedish context. However, French taste did not dominate amongst the aristocracy; English novelties, fashions and manners were also important. In transmitting French tastes and fashions to Sweden, Swedish diplomats and aristocrats in France had a key role. They acted on behalf of their families, friends and sovereign, when orchestrating commissions of clothing and paintings or apprenticeships of cooks in the kitchens of French aristocracy. In clothing and outer appearance French fashion dominated high society throughout Europe, despite fashionable English, Polish or Turkish attires. In Sweden, the dominance of French or other foreign luxury in the form of garments and clothing was restricted through sumptuary laws. The aristocracy saw the

59 Hans Axel von Fersen to Axel von Fersen 17 August 1778. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv vol. 8. Stafsundsarkivet, RA.

60 *Amiral Carl Tersmedens memoarer, vol. III, I Fredrik I:s Sverige*, ed. Nils Erdman (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1916), 21. ‘Född fransos, uppfödd portugis, hårfrisör och kock till profession, har han varit hos mig alltsedan augusti 1734.’

61 *Ibid.*, 21–2, 36–9, 51, 67.

political and economic importance of favouring domestic production, and much of its consumption was of domestic products; but this did not prevent those who desired luxury goods from buying or commissioning their clothing from France or elsewhere. French quality, taste and fashion were considered supreme, and a true aristocratic elegance was French.

Another aspect of French taste which diffused to Sweden was genre paintings, an essential part of any elite home interior. Like François Boucher's *Milliner*, commissioned from the artists by Crown Princess Lovisa Ulrika through envoy Carl Fredrik Scheffer, paintings distributed in physical and metaphorical form French luxury in France and outside its borders. Boucher's *Milliner* is more of an imaginary representation of urban elite luxury and comfort in eighteenth-century Paris than faithful reproduction of a certain interior. This was understood by the contemporaries, who could read paintings and their narration of luxury goods. However, Boucher's genre paintings depict in detail those French luxury goods that were so sought after by elites, both in France and abroad. All its connotations were reproduced, reworked and adapted to Swedish context by Pehr Hilleström in one of his genre paintings, also called *The Milliner*.

French servants were essential for an elite lifestyle. The importance of educating children in elite cosmopolitan culture and French language was achieved most thoroughly through French-speaking governesses. Certain circles within the Swedish aristocracy willingly invested considerable sums to educate their children, but also to apprentice their Swedish cooks in France or to employ French cooks. Cooks acted as proof of the status and refined taste of their employers, but also added considerably to pleasure and comfort in elites' everyday life. Here again, the aristocracy balanced national taste and French taste.

It has to be stressed that also other aspects of aristocratic lifestyle could have been chosen for similar outcome: also architecture and interior designs, intellectual and literary culture or high military careers in the service of France or German states could serve as examples. The influence of France and French culture traversed the elite lifestyle in eighteenth-century Sweden, to such an extent that it is not easy to point to any aspects of aristocratic lifestyle not influenced by French taste. However, Swedish elites could never compete with their French counterparts in the field of luxury and ostentatious display (probably they did not even wish to), which led to adaptation, acclimatization and transformation of French taste for luxury to Swedish, more discreet and simplistic tastes.