

Georgian Taste:

Friedrich Karl von Hardenberg's Journey to France in 1741

George II of England has always been a marginal figure to the historians of art. His name has never really been connected with great architecture or paintings, and his well known wish to have no fiddles in Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks¹ may be seen to be indicative of his preferred pastimes of hunting and other, less artsy, more roguish interests. Nevertheless, some great art was created in his personal sphere. The architect Robert Morris built "Marble Hill", a modern neo-palladian villa for Henrietta Howard, mistress of the King. And Queen Caroline was a patroness to gardeners such as William Kent and Charles Bridgman. It is she, whom we have to thank for the new layouts of Kensington Gardens and Richmond Lodge.

The style of architecture that we have come to know as Georgian spanned the reigns of George II, from 1727-1760, and his grandson, the prosperous George III, from 1761 to 1820. There is currently an exhibition at Buckingham Palace entitled "George III and Queen Charlotte" which reveals that most of the artistic ideas in the 1770s originated in George II's reign, such as a taste in furniture that was inherently antagonistic: Neo-classical and rococo elements were aesthetically contradictory. Queen Charlotte preferred the old-fashioned continental style, perhaps a reflection of her own past, which later disappeared after being caricatured and exaggerated by Chippendale and others. The roots and historical setting of the English rococo were shown and discussed in an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert [Museum] in 1987: Certain connections to the contemporary artistic situations in the North European countries were drawn, but a clear lineage and sufficient understanding of the development is still lacking. I am sure that it is necessary to look more closely.

Art and style, as all of "society's" achievements and developments, are [more often than not,] indelibly bound up with the interests and fates of specific men and women. The role and influence that one such person played who has only recently been considered at greater depth is Friedrich Karl von Hardenberg. It may turn out, that he was pivotal in this regard. Although it may yet be too early to make a final judgment in the matter, certain documents have recently been coming to light that give insight on his involvement in the artistic ancestry, and the circumstantial evidence is very convincing. It is this evidence that I will be presenting to you today in greater detail.

¹ "in April 1749 the recently signed Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle was celebrated with a fireworks display in Green Park in London. We remember the even today largely because of Handel's music; but as an occasion it typifies its age, and surviving accounts from contemporary newspapers and letter, with their vivid detail and laconic characterization, restore it brilliantly to life. Beforehand, worried letters were written to [the "Comptroller of his Majesty's Fireworks as well as for War as for Triumph"] discussing the details of Handel's orchestration (the king "hoped there would be no fiddles[sic]")..."

Thus I will invite you to the far-off Kingdom of Hanover in northern Germany, involving you in the search for the family roots of the British Georgian and rococo styles.

Strictly speaking, Hanover was not yet a kingdom at the time of our story. It was one of the princedoms of the Holy Roman Empire and one of the "German Legacies" of the British Georges. That is to say, that from 1714 onward the monarchs of Britain were also "Elector-Princes" in Hanover, so called because they belonged to the electoral college that elected the Holy Roman Emperor. With the rulers of Bohemia, Brandenburg and Saxony, the British Georges therefore also belonged to the leading nobles of the Holy Roman Empire. This dual role of the British Monarchy came to an end when Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in Britain while the Hanoverian constitution did not allow for a female head of state.

The Georges were not the only scions of German lands to acquire crowns beyond the Motherland: Friedrich crowned himself King in Prussia, Augustus the Strong became King in Poland, and Sweden saw a new German royal family at the time that Sophie of Hanover, the mother of George I, was named to be first in line to the throne of England [in the case of Queen Anne's death.] Concurring with the style of politics at the time these newly crowned monarchs rapidly embellished their residences: Dresden, Berlin, Stockholm, but also Hanover wanted to [thus] demonstrate their new status and power.

At the time the royal tastes were predominantly influenced by the Italian and Dutch styles. Sophie of Hanover, for example, was brought up in The Hague in the Netherlands, and her husband Ernst August loved to visit northern Italy. They commissioned the Great Garden on the outskirts of Hanover, basically a Dutch canal garden with the gallery building decorated by the Italian masters Dossa Grana und Pietro Rosso. George Frederic Handel was appointed to his position as composer to the court after he had returned from his sojourn in Italy and the Italian bishop Agostino Steffani was commissioned to compose operas and to consecrate churches such as Saint Clement's in Hanover, built by yet another Italian, Tommaso Giusti. The most splendid carnival outside Venice was given in Hanover's opera house for the benefit of many princely guests.

These were joyful days. They came to an end when, in June of 1714, Princess Sophie died in her 84th year, eight weeks before her English cousin, Queen Anne. Sophie had never been to England, and yet it was her son Georg, who was crowned George I in August of 1714.

Neither George I nor his son, George II would ever speak English well. Although much more splendor was attached to the British throne, they never felt at home in Britain, probably because of the restrained role of the monarch in the more democratic tradition of Great Britain compared to a more absolutist style still practiced in Germany. They preferred Germany and visited Hanover regularly until 1755, when George II came for the last time.

A man who had been a witness to all the developments was [the afore mentioned] Friedrich Karl von Hardenberg – a baron you may previously never have heard of. Yet it was he who may have been pivotal for the development of what has come to be known as the Georgian style.

It would be his nephew, Karl August von Hardenberg, a Prussian Prime Minister, friend of the Duke of Wellington and ferocious opponent of Napoleon Buonaparte, who would later receive much attention from the historians and make the name Hardenberg famous. Friedrich Karl on the other hand might have been wholly forgotten if he had not left his nephew hundreds of letters, manuscripts and pamphlets, a heritage which is proving to be quite valuable. Very little of this archive has so far been published, and much of it is still largely unknown since this archive belonged to the communist East Germany, which had its own reasons for not being much interested in delving into such obviously aristocratic sources.

Friedrich Karl was born in the dominion of Hanover in 1696. His Uncle Christan Ulrich was a close friend of George I and Lord Chamberlain at the court in Hanover. He planned a court career for Friedrich Karl and thus trained him in diplomacy, court-etiquette, ceremony and also, assuredly, in art. Art was seen as a necessity of princely life, an important method of representing power. Art was a central part of a young statesman's education in the 18th century. Reading and understanding art, which contained the symbols of power, were central tasks for a future courtier. Hanover, as I have mentioned, was a far-off place. Certainly not anywhere, where a sufficient education was possible. So Friedrich Karl was sent by his uncle on a Grand Tour in 1717 which took him to The Netherlands, Italy and France. In France he met Liselotte von der Pfalz, cousin of George I and wife to the Duc d'Orleans, his first contact with royalty.

Meanwhile back in Hanover. - Several scholars have shown that George I and II paid much attention to their splendid receptions when they were in Germany. For these they maintained the buildings and Great Garden at Herrenhausen and some alterations were ordered. Yet they never went so far as to erect new buildings! The major reason for this was certainly the double monarchy which required much energy simply for the organization of these so heterogeneous courts.

This was one reason why the King had to base much of his power on his councilors. Soon after Hardenberg returned from his Grand Tour he became member of the King's chamber and thus a personal advisor to George II. Hardenberg's ideas were very modern: he tried to re-organize the old-fashioned administration, made propositions for trading, worked to create a currency standard, suggested new farming methods, built an observatory at Göttingen University, and thought about technical problems of mining systems. Ultimately very few of his brilliant ideas were realized. In the contrary: Very often he was hindered, and some of the letters suggest that he was even slandered by some of his counterparts in the King's chamber.

A position which would give him more freedom was established in 1728, probably propagated by George II himself who was crowned the year before

and, at the time, was in love with Lady Yarmouth, who happened to be Hardenberg's sister-in-law. The title of this newly created position was Director of Buildings and Gardens, which gave him responsibility for all matters concerning the Royal Parks, buildings, decoration of festivities, etcetera. We can assume that he was now a very close advisor to the king, and the king was especially fond of Hardenberg's suggestions regarding material and cost cutting measures for public buildings.

An artistic orientation was difficult for Friedrich Karl because there were no examples that he could readily draw upon. No further equivalent monarchies were to be found in the vicinity. Augustus the Strong resided most of his time at Varsov, Poland. Prussia's king Friedrich Wilhelm did not show any artistic interest, and the neighboring courts at Braunschweig and Cassel were more or less in decline.

This vacuum allowed for new sources of inspiration. I have mentioned that until now inspiration was drawn from Italian and Dutch sources. The sources are now shifting to France. The Bavarian Elector-Prince engaged the French gardener Dominique Gerard, a pupil of André Le Notre's, in 1715 to lay out a huge canal-garden in the style of Versailles in Schleissheim and Nymphenburg. Soon Francois Cuvillies, the Wallonian dwarf followed. He developed incredible skills to bring the light style of Rococo into the interiors of Brühl Palace and to castle Amalienburg.

It comes as no surprise, that after a prolonged crisis and a disorientation regarding the style during the construction of the Würzburg residence, the architect Balthasar Neumann was sent to France to study modern architecture. The result is now listed as a world heritage site and is truly one of Germany's architectural marvels. And it was Frederick the Great of Prussia who soon after his accession to the throne in 1740 built the Eastern Wing in Charlottenburg Palace – interiors and exteriors decidedly French. His aim was to express his modern thinking in erecting modern architecture.

It was during this time, in 1741, that Hardenberg had a chance to escape from Hanover's stagnation and visit France and Paris. The reasons for the journey which nearly covered one year were not pleasant:

One of the reasons for his journey was that the wing of the royal residence in Hanover had been destroyed by fire. Solutions were requested, and a journey to France was supposed to provide these.

More serious was the political situation in Europe at the beginning of the First Silesian War. George II attempted to solve the crisis by joining Great Britain and Hanover [not only dynastically, but also] politically. It was the King himself who wanted Hardenberg to be in France, in order to facilitate talks at the appropriate time, a task which in the end never came to fruition. Hardenberg was thus furnished with an official task and challenge, - he was given a chance to prove his abilities.

What follows now is an account of this journey. We will see what interested and what impressed Hardenberg whilst giving us a flavor of the time.

He arrived in Paris in July of 1741. One of the first people he met was the publisher Pierre Jean Mariette who showed him around in his shop explaining new architectural books and prints. He pointed out some drawings which he had bought a year earlier in the auction of Pierre Crozat's collection, a treasure which was estimated to be worth 300.000 Livres. Hardenberg liked drawings by Raffael and remarked upon Callot; he bought some books and asked Mariette about famous artists. According to Mariette, and I quote: "Boffrand and Cartaud are the best architects at present, and Bouchardon, follower of the late Girardon makes sculptures, and Rigaud and Largilliere are still famous for their portraits."

Hardenberg and Mariette seem to have liked each other. One day later our envoyé was invited by Mariette to visit the famous sculptor Edme Bouchardon in his atelier and they found him working on the Fountain of Rue Grenelle. Bouchardon came outside with them to show the construction of his masterpiece. Hardenberg was thrilled and noted in his diary: "The architecture is simple and noble, and the sculpture goes perfectly along with it". Years later he would send the Hanoverian sculptor Johann Friedrich Ziesenis to Bouchardon so that his protégé might learn from the famous frenchman.

A few hours later they are found at the Academy exhibition in the Grand Salon of the Louvre. He liked the little guide book, a novelty to him. Nevertheless he was quite critical: "I distaste the grand pictures which I have seen, they do neither have design nor color...". He paid much more attention to the smaller canvasses such as "Modesty" and "The Virgin" by Vanloo, still lifes by Desportes and Ladey, charming Portraits by Aved, de la Tour and Nattier – depicting the Princess Rohan. Bouchardon presented a bas relief and drawings. In his diary Hardenberg wrote: "The Morning Toilet of Venus belongs to Count Tessin. After Chardin. Painted in a very special way. And the son of Mr Le Noir amuses himself in building a card house, painted by the same."

Tessin, "le connoisseur", as Hardenberg called him once, was one of the most influential ambassadors at the French court. From 1738 to 1742 he bought and commissioned many masterpieces for the Swedish court and for his own collection, now part of the National Gallery in Stockholm. When Hardenberg met him, they conversed about their passion for the arts. Count Tessin said to him: "The arts do not grow like mushrooms, what made me amass grand collections and carry them back to Sweden is the fact that they may serve as seed." Hardenberg was not in a position to collect paintings but he acquired many copper prints: ornaments and illustrations by Meissonier, Boucher, Oppenordt, Watteau and others. His diary tells us much about paintings in churches and collections, such as those found at the Palais de Tuilleries and the Palais Royal.

This was the basis for his manuscript entitled "Thoughts on painting and the most famous painters for an unknown young man of distinction", which was written in 1758. He created a family tree of the different schools of painting, describes the artists, the different techniques and gives some advice concerning the handling of pictures. He referred to some French sources but worked into it some of his own ideas. This manuscript, not more than a

compilation with commentary, should actually be considered as one of the first German theories of the history of art. It is very likely that his nephew Prince Karl August von Hardenberg, whom I have mentioned before, was influenced by his uncle's thoughts.

But back to Paris: Two days after the exhibition Hardenberg visited Cardinal Fleury, the French Secretary of foreign affairs, at Versailles. There he was told about the gobelin-manufacture of Beauvais and its director Oudry whom he visited a week later in his studio at the Louvre. Oudry was busy copying a picture of a Silen and a Nymph after an original of the Royal Collection when the Marquise de Maillebois appeared with her daughter the Marquise de Sourches asking the master to paint the young woman's cat. Surprised and exasperated at the audacity of this menial request, Hardenberg, noted: "there is no considerable house in Paris which does not possess a picture by his hand."

Hardenberg is not very much interested in animal paintings and asked Oudry about tapestries and the manufactories that he had seen in Brussels and the Savonnerie in 1717 and 1718. The director explained the art of making carpets: He showed him the picture of a Crucifixion by Nattier which the Parliament of Rouen had commissioned for a wall hanging. The costs of 100 Ecues for the artist's work had to be paid by the patron plus the expenses of the weaving itself. Two days later Hardenberg returned to see the tapestry of "Les Amours de Psyche" for the Prince Rohan. Another two years went by before he finally ordered some tapestries for himself: Oudry offered him another subject of the Psyche-story that Tessin bought for the king of Sweden or, alternatively, or other scenes by the painter Boucher. Finally, in spring 1749 four weavings reached Hanover with the themes of Dance, Music, Gardening, and Collation.

Hardenberg was also very interested in the decorative arts: As one might in the Paris of today, he visited tailors and textile merchants. He talked about fashionable accessories and the new suits for the Duke of Sulzbach. He saw two coaches and a Sedan-chair made for the Elector-Bishop of Trier for use at the coronation of the emperor in Frankfurt, worth 220.000 livres. Hardenberg mentions the Porcelain of the Saint Cloud manufactory which he thinks comparable to Chinese Porcelain. At the house of his friend, the Saxon minister Count Loss he admires a silver dinner service which was made by Claude Ballin for 60.000 Livres. Hardenberg might have bought some pieces from this silver smith who was said to be quite conservative in his style. In 1753 our man from Hanover finally ordered a silver-service from François Thomas Germain, who ran a traditional silver manufactory at the Louvre and was specialized in furnishing the many tables of ambitious ambassadors. It must have been in the style of the service of the Duke of Orléans and the similar one of the Portuguese minister Marquis de Mello that interested Hardenberg especially. The tureen-covers of these services were adorned by a boar, the beast of the Hardenberg family crest. He asked the architect François Blondel, who acted as his agent and artistic adviser, to ask Germain for some supplements to the tureens, inspired by produce of the gardens: some "Jardinage" such as beets, asparagus and cabbage. 24 sets with plates, covers and dishes reached Hanover. Blondel expressed the wish that this order might stimulate other families in Hanover to commission such services

from Paris. They did not do so but George III, who was about to modernize the court in Hanover, ordered a modern silver-service from Robert-Jacques Auguste, pupil of Germain, in 1772/76, which is now at Waddesdon Manor. Although the king never came to Hanover he had nonetheless always planned such a journey. This was possibly the reason why he bought the Hardenberg service in 1779 to supplement the service from Auguste. It was of a quality worthy of a king!

Our baron from Hanover spent lots of money in Paris, which became a bone of contention with his married brothers who thought him wasting family-money. But the result was, that Hardenberg was the only one in Hanover who was able to give a dinner for the King, having all the necessary accoutrements. All the objects from Paris found their place in Hardenberg's town house or the garden house, both built in the 1750s by the young architect Johann Dietrich Heumann who was frequently supported by his patron. Hardenberg had him study at Blondel's private architecture academy in Paris, an institute where several of the best European architects were trained or found inspiration.

When Hardenberg met Blondel for the first time in 1741, the French architect took him to all the interesting places in Paris. Such as the Dome d'Invalides and a new building site, pointing out some technical details or ornaments. The small rooms and little gardens of the modern rococo always held an attraction for Hardenberg – the "petit maniere", as he calls it. No wonder that he was quite critical when he saw Versailles, the grand manner of Louis [le Grand] XIV: The gardens were reported as badly maintained, the apartments of the Queen were ill-furnished, and the facade showed an obstinate architecture. He describes every detail of the cold splendor: the unfitting wig on Bernini's bust of Louis Quatorze, the Mirror Gallery with Ballin's silver chandeliers and splendid pictures of Le Brun.

Nevertheless he preferred the traditional architecture and not the style in fashion at the time that we now call Louis Quinze. When Heumann was sent to Blondel from 1751 to 1753 a discourse of architecture took room in the letters being exchanged between the three. The common idea was that the progressive and appropriate architecture should be a combination of French and Italian traditions.

This struck a cord and rang true and George II accepted this as the blueprint for a new style which was incorporated in the reconstruction of his new Hanoverian palace. The sober architecture of the English neo-classicism with its Italian background and the modern continental rococo met in the ideas of Blondel. In 1742 Blondel's ideas were realized.

Like Frederick the Great, Hardenberg felt the symbolic power of the contemporary French architecture. He felt that contemporary policy had to be expressed in forms that were supposed to overcome the traditional German baroque architecture. The building director Hardenberg viewed himself as a teacher of good taste and a patron to the arts thus furthering these convictions.

But coming to the end of my talk, I will briefly touch a second influential journey of his. In 1744 he visited England for a whole year. In London he saw modern buildings and modern landscaped gardens. He met Lord Burlington and surely was conscious of the reception of Italian architecture, and predominantly Palladian edifices. He found London much more accommodating than the French capital, but Paris remained the more fascinating metropole.

It is an interesting question if the Hanover residence would have looked different if he would have come to England first. Hardenberg bought very few architectural books in England, and neither did he look for silver. He was interested in optical machines and any technical equipment, but no objects of decorative art are listed or are known to have been bought.

Of course, Hardenberg brought back many novel ideas, for example with regards to gardens. Even though he had previously studied the French gardens in depth, as we know from the many notes he made in his diaries, he did not end up using these for the Great Garden at Herrenhausen. He had, in fact, not become an admirer of the French garden. It was Houghton Hall, Chiswick, Wrest Park and other such places where he experienced more natural, less obviously formally styled grounds that would mould his personal affinity. These English Gardens were probably more suitable for his taste which itself was becoming a reflection of the enlightenment. According to these modern precepts the aesthetic and utility should always be combined. The chances to execute such a "natural" garden in Hanover were quite unrealistic. So in 1752 he drew up a plan for the Duke of Braunschweig to change his garden at Salzdahlum into an English Garden - the first proposition of a landscaped garden in Germany ever. Clever enough, he knew that this formal garden was originally laid out parallel to the one in Hanover, and was its twin. Ultimately Hardenberg's plans for Salzdahlum were never realized, but it did mark the beginning of what the English master landscapist Capability Brown created at Richmond-Garden in the vicinity of Salzdahlum only 15 years later.

Hardenberg felt that a combination of an English park and a French house would have been the optimum. Maybe Palaces like Guibals Monrepos near Stuttgart and Nicolas de Pigage's Schloss Benrath near Dusseldorf with their naturalistic gardens reflect his ideas best. In Hanover such projects were never executed and never seriously planned. And here I want to remind you of the inherent contrariness of the taste at the English court with their amalgamation of rococo and classicism. It would be interesting to see if the continental rococo-taste was used to show a certain vicinity to the Royal Family.

I hope that I could show you some news and curiosities from the heart of the European continent, from a place where the change of time and fashion was reported and reflected. I am very glad to have been invited to speak here, in the Hillwood Museum, a place where a splendid collection gives an idea of what Hardenberg was fascinated by when he traveled in France. The excellent furniture, gobelins, panels and paintings here give us an idea of what he encountered 260 years ago. His aim was to advise the king, to better the social and political situation through organizational and technical

help, and, in the tradition of the coming enlightenment, to educate the people. Enlightenment is something that was needed as much then, as it is even now. The germination of the Enlightenment and the flowering of society were to be brought about by a particular seed. For Hardenberg, as it is still obviously the case for the benefactor Majorie Merryweather Post, the seed that needed to be planted was Art.

(Marcus Köhler)