

DARK SECRET HISTORIES

Joe Murray Callaghan (ed.)

**Insane Love and Erotic
Madness from Maria
Theresa to Jack the Ripper
& More
Real Facts and Hoaxes**

feat. Catherine the Great, Frederick the Great, Lewis Carroll, Prince Edward Albert, Lord Randolph Churchill, Aaron Kosminski, Andrei Chikaitilo, Ion Rîmaru—The Vampire of Bucharest

*... and Its Intriguing Dangerous
Splendour*

INTEGRAL

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Maria Theresa, the Deadly Castle and the Legend of the Last Horse

“From the very beginning, the death of the empress Maria Theresa gave rise to a series of legends in the collective mindset. The reforms initiated by the empress within the Habsburg Empire weren’t agreed by the conservative elite that instinctively felt that through their implementation, was to lose a multitude of political advantages in the favour of the central power. It was not a mere chance, that dubious rumours concerning the deviant sexual behaviour of the empress were spread in the collective mentality through the servants from the nobles’ courts. Empress’s admiration towards breed horses led in the end to an explanation for her passion in relation to a certain sexual behaviour and finally to explaining Maria Theresa’s death through this type of sexual behaviour. Thus, the legend of the empress’s death received zoophiles and perverted connotations and was kept in the collective mindset as a mark of the spicy stories”, write two young researchers in 2010 for *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica*.

Maria Theresa Walburga Amalia Christina (German: *Maria Theresia*; May 13, 1717—November 29, 1780) was the only female ruler of the Habsburg dominions and the last of the House of Habsburg. She was the sovereign of Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Bohemia, Transylvania, Mantua, Milan, Lodomeria and Galicia, the Austrian Netherlands, and Parma. By marriage, she was Duchess of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany and Holy Roman Empress. Her title after the death of her husband was: “Maria Theresa, by the Grace of God, Dowager Empress of the Romans, Queen of Hungary, of Bohemia, of Dalmatia, of Croatia, of Slavonia, of Galicia, of Lodomeria etc.; Archduchess of Austria; Duchess of Burgundy, of Styria, of Carinthia and of Carniola; Grand Princess of Transylvania; Margravine of Moravia; Duchess of Brabant, of Limburg, of Luxemburg, of Guelders, of Württemberg, of Upper and Lower Silesia, of Milan, of Mantua, of Parma, of Piacenza, of Guastalla, of Auschwitz and of Zator; Princess of Swabia; Princely Countess of Habsburg, of Flanders, of Tyrol, of Hainault, of Kyburg, of Gorizia and of Gradisca; Margravine of Burgau, of Upper and Lower Lusatia; Countess of Namur; Lady of the Wendish Mark and of Mechlin; Dowager Duchess of Lorraine and Bar, Dowager Grand Duchess of Tuscany”.

She started her 40-year reign when her father, Emperor Charles VI, died in October 1740. Charles VI paved the way for her accession with the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713 and spent his entire reign securing it. He neglected the advice of Prince Eugene of Savoy, who averred that a strong military and a rich treasury were more important than mere signatures. Eventually, he left behind a weakened and impoverished state, particularly due to the War of the Polish Succession and the Russo-Turkish War (1735–1739). Moreover, upon his death, Saxony, Prussia, Bavaria, and France all repudiated the sanction they had recognised during his lifetime. Frederick II of Prussia (who became Maria Theresa’s greatest rival for most of her reign) promptly invaded and took the affluent Habsburg province of Silesia in the seven-year conflict known as the War of the Austrian Succession. In defiance of the grave situation, she managed to secure the vital support of the Hungarians for the war effort. Over the course of the war, despite the loss of Silesia and a few minor territories in Italy, Maria Theresa successfully defended her rule over most of the Habsburg empire. Maria Theresa later unsuccessfully tried to reconquer Silesia during the Seven Years’ War.

Maria Theresa and her husband, Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor, had eleven daughters, including the Queen of France, the Queen of Naples and Sicily, the Duchess of Parma, and five sons, including two Holy Roman Emperors, Joseph II and Leopold II. Of the sixteen children, ten survived to adulthood. Though she was expected to cede power to Francis and Joseph, both of whom were officially her co-rulers in Austria and Bohemia, Maria Theresa was the absolute sovereign who ruled with the counsel of her advisers.

Maria Theresa promulgated institutional, financial and educational reforms, with the assistance of Wenzel Anton of Kaunitz-Rietberg, Friedrich Wilhelm von Haugwitz and Gerard van Swieten. She also promoted commerce and the development of agriculture, and reorganised Austria's ramshackle military, all of which strengthened Austria's international standing. However, she despised the Protestants, and on certain occasions she ordered their expulsion to remote parts of the realm. She also advocated for the state church and refused to allow religious pluralism. Consequently, her regime was criticized as intolerant by some contemporaries.

The second and eldest surviving child of Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI and Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, Archduchess Maria Theresa was born on May 13, 1717 in Vienna, a year after the death of her elder brother, Archduke Leopold, and was baptised on that same evening. The dowager empresses, her aunt Wilhelmine Amalia of Brunswick-Lüneburg and grandmother Eleonor Magdalene of Neuburg, were her godmothers. Most descriptions of her baptism stress that the infant was carried ahead of her cousins, Maria Josepha and Maria Amalia, the daughters of Charles VI's elder brother and predecessor, Joseph I, before the eyes of their mother, Wilhelmine Amalia. It was clear that Maria Theresa would outrank them, even though their grandfather, Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, had his sons sign the Mutual Pact of Succession, which gave precedence to the daughters of the elder brother. Her father was the only surviving male member of the House of Habsburg and hoped for a son who would prevent the extinction of his dynasty and succeed him. Thus, the birth of Maria Theresa was a great disappointment to him and the people of Vienna; Charles never managed to overcome this feeling.

Maria Theresa replaced Maria Josepha as heir presumptive to the Habsburg realms the moment she was born; Charles VI had issued the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713 which had placed his nieces behind his own daughters in the line of succession. Charles sought the other European powers' approval for disinheriting his nieces. They exacted harsh terms: in the Treaty of Vienna (1731), Great Britain demanded that Austria abolish the Ostend Company in return for its recognition of the Pragmatic Sanction. In total, Great Britain, France, Saxony, United Provinces, Spain, Prussia, Russia, Denmark, Sardinia, Bavaria and the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire recognised the sanction. France, Spain, Saxony, Bavaria and Prussia later reneged.

Little more than a year after her birth, Maria Theresa was joined by a sister, Maria Anna, and another one, named Maria Amalia, was born in 1724. The portraits of the imperial family show that Maria Theresa resembled Elisabeth Christine and Maria Anna. The Prussian ambassador noted that she had large blue eyes, fair hair with a slight tinge of red, a wide mouth and a notably strong body. Unlike many other members of the House of Habsburg, neither Maria Theresa's parents nor her grandparents were closely related to each other.

Maria Theresa was a serious and reserved child who enjoyed singing and archery. She was barred from horse riding by her father, but she would later learn the basics for the sake of her Hungarian coronation ceremony. The imperial family staged opera productions, often conducted by Charles VI, in which she relished participating. Her education was overseen by Jesuits. Contemporaries thought her Latin to be quite good, but in all else, the Jesuits did not educate her well. Her spelling and punctuation were unconventional and she lacked the formal manner and speech which had characterised her Habsburg predecessors. Maria Theresa developed a close relationship with Countess Marie Karoline von Fuchs-Mollard, who taught her etiquette. She was educated in drawing, painting, music and dancing—the disciplines which would have prepared her for the role of queen consort. Her father allowed her to attend meetings of the council from the age of 14 but never discussed the affairs of state with her. Even though he had spent the last decades of his life securing Maria Theresa's inheritance, Charles never prepared his daughter for her future role as sovereign.

The question of Maria Theresa's marriage was raised early in her childhood. Leopold Clement of Lorraine was first considered to be the appropriate suitor, and he was supposed to visit Vienna and meet the Archduchess in 1723. These plans were forestalled by his death from smallpox.

Leopold Clement's younger brother, Francis Stephen, was invited to Vienna. Even though Francis Stephen was his favourite candidate for Maria Theresa's hand, the Emperor considered other possibilities. Religious differences prevented him from arranging his daughter's marriage to the Protestant prince Frederick of Prussia. In 1725, he betrothed her to Charles of Spain and her sister, Maria Anna, to Philip of Spain. Other European powers compelled him to renounce the pact he had made with the Queen of Spain, Elisabeth Farnese. Maria Theresa, who had become close to Francis Stephen, was relieved.

Francis Stephen remained at the imperial court until 1729, when he ascended the throne of Lorraine, but was not formally promised Maria Theresa's hand until January 31, 1736, during the War of the Polish Succession. Louis XV of France demanded that Maria Theresa's fiancé surrender his ancestral Duchy of Lorraine to accommodate his father-in-law, Stanisław I, who had been deposed as King of Poland. Francis Stephen was to receive the Grand Duchy of Tuscany upon the death of childless Grand Duke Gian Gastone de' Medici. The couple were married on February 12, 1736.

The Duchess of Lorraine's love for her husband was strong and possessive. The letters she sent to him shortly before their marriage expressed her eagerness to see him; his letters, on the other hand, were stereotyped and formal. She was very jealous of her husband and his infidelity was the greatest problem of their marriage, with Maria Wilhelmina, Princess of Auersperg, as his best-known mistress.

Upon Gian Gastone's death on July 9, 1737, Francis Stephen ceded Lorraine and became Grand Duke of Tuscany. In 1738, Charles VI sent the young couple to make their formal entry into Tuscany. A triumphal arch was erected at the Porta Galla in celebration, where it remains today. Their stay in Florence was brief. Charles VI soon recalled them, as he feared he might die while his heiress was miles away in Tuscany. In the summer of 1738, Austria suffered defeats during the ongoing Russo-Turkish War. The Turks reversed Austrian gains in Serbia, Wallachia and Bosnia. The Viennese rioted at the cost of the war. Francis Stephen was popularly despised, as he was thought to be a cowardly French spy. The war was concluded the next year with the Treaty of Belgrade.

Charles VI died on October 20, 1740, probably of (mushroom?) poisoning. He had ignored the advice of Prince Eugene of Savoy who had urged him to concentrate on filling the treasury and equipping the army rather than on acquiring signatures of fellow monarchs. The Emperor, who spent his entire reign securing the Pragmatic Sanction, left Austria in an impoverished state, bankrupted by the recent Turkish war and the War of the Polish Succession; the treasury contained only 100,000 gulden, which were claimed by his widow. The army had also been weakened due to these wars; instead of the full number of 160,000, the army had been reduced to about 108,000, and they were scattered in small areas from the Austrian Netherlands to Transylvania, and from Silesia to Tuscany. They were also poorly trained and discipline was lacking. Later Maria Theresa even made a remark: "as for the state in which I found the army, I cannot begin to describe it".

Maria Theresa found herself in a difficult situation. She did not know enough about matters of state and she was unaware of the weakness of her father's ministers. She decided to rely on her father's advice to retain his counselors and to defer to her husband, whom she considered to be more experienced, on other matters. Both decisions later gave cause for regret. Ten years later, Maria Theresa recalled in her *Political Testament* the circumstances under which she had ascended: "I found myself without money, without credit, without army, without experience and knowledge of my own and finally, also without any counsel because each one of them at first wanted to wait and see how things would develop".

She dismissed the possibility that other countries might try to seize her territories and immediately started ensuring the imperial dignity for herself; since a woman could not be elected Holy Roman Empress, Maria Theresa wanted to secure the imperial office for her husband, but Francis Stephen did not possess enough land or rank within the Holy Roman Empire. In order to make him eligible for the imperial throne and to enable him to vote in the imperial elections as elector of Bohemia (which she could not do because of her sex), Maria Theresa made Francis Stephen co-ruler of the Austrian and

Bohemian lands on November 21, 1740. It took more than a year for the Diet of Hungary to accept Francis Stephen as co-ruler, since they asserted that the sovereignty of Hungary could not be shared. Despite her love for him and his position as co-ruler, Maria Theresa never allowed her husband to decide matters of state and often dismissed him from council meetings when they disagreed.

The first display of the new queen's authority was the formal act of homage of the Lower Austrian Estates to her on November 22, 1740. It was an elaborate public event which served as a formal recognition and legitimation of her accession. The oath of fealty to Maria Theresa was taken on the same day in the Ritterstube of the Hofburg.

The centralization of the Habsburg government necessitated the creation of a unified legal system. Previously, various lands in the Habsburg realm had their own laws. These laws were compiled and the resulting *Codex Theresianus* could be used as a basis for legal unification. In 1769, the *Constitutio Criminalis Theresiana* was published, and this was a codification of the traditional criminal justice system since the Middle Ages. This criminal code allowed the possibility of establishing the truth through torture, and it also criminalised witchcraft and various religious offenses. Although this law came into force in Austria and Bohemia, it was not valid in Hungary.

She was particularly concerned with the sexual morality of her subjects. Thus, she established a Chastity Commission (*Keuschheitskommission*) in 1752 to clamp down on prostitution, homosexuality, adultery and even sex between members of different religions. This Commission cooperated closely with the police, and the Commission even employed secret agents to investigate private lives of men and women with bad reputation. They were authorised to raid banquets, clubs and private gatherings and to arrest those suspected of violating social norms. The punishments included whipping, deportation, or even the death penalty.

Over the course of twenty years, Maria Theresa gave birth to sixteen children, thirteen of whom survived infancy. The first child, Maria Elisabeth (1737–1740), was born a little less than a year after the wedding. The child's sex caused great disappointment and so would the births of Maria Anna, the eldest surviving child, and Maria Carolina (1740–1741). While fighting to preserve her inheritance, Maria Theresa gave birth to a son named after Saint Joseph, to whom she had repeatedly prayed for a male child during the pregnancy. Maria Theresa's favourite child, Maria Christina, was born on her 25th birthday, four days before the defeat of the Austrian army in Chotusitz. Five more children were born during the war: Maria Elisabeth, Charles, Maria Amalia, Leopold and Maria Carolina (1748–1748). During this period, there was no rest for Maria Theresa during pregnancies or around the births; the war and child-bearing were carried on simultaneously. Five children were born during the peace between the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War: Maria Johanna, Maria Josepha, Maria Carolina, Ferdinand and Maria Antonia. She delivered her last child, Maximilian Francis, during the Seven Years' War, aged 39. Maria Theresa asserted that, had she not been almost always pregnant, she would have gone into battle herself.

Maria Theresa's mother, Empress Elisabeth Christine, died in 1750. Four years later, Maria Theresa's governess, Marie Karoline von Fuchs-Mollard, died. She showed her gratitude to Countess Fuchs by having her buried in the Imperial Crypt along with the members of the imperial family.

Shortly after giving birth to the younger children, Maria Theresa was confronted with the task of marrying off the elder ones. She led the marriage negotiations along with the campaigns of her wars and the duties of state. She used them as pawns in dynastic games and sacrificed their happiness for the benefit of the state. A devoted but self-conscious mother, she wrote to all of her children at least once a week and believed herself entitled to exercise authority over her children regardless of their age and rank.

Following her fiftieth birthday in May 1767, Maria Theresa contracted smallpox from her daughter-in-law, Maria Josepha of Bavaria. She survived, but the new empress did not. Maria Theresa then forced her daughter, Archduchess Maria Josepha, to pray with her in the Imperial Crypt next to the unsealed tomb of Empress Maria Josepha. The Archduchess started showing smallpox rash two days after

visiting the crypt and soon died. Maria Carolina was to replace her as the pre-determined bride of King Ferdinand IV of Naples. Maria Theresa blamed herself for her daughter's death for the rest of her life because, at the time, the concept of an extended incubation period was largely unknown and it was believed that Maria Josepha had caught smallpox from the body of the late empress.

In April 1770, Maria Theresa's youngest daughter, Maria Antonia, married Louis, Dauphin of France, by proxy in Vienna. Maria Antonia's education was neglected and when the French showed an interest in her, her mother went about educating her as best she could about the court of Versailles and the French. Maria Theresa kept up a fortnightly correspondence with Maria Antonia, now called Marie Antoinette, in which she often reproached her for laziness and frivolity and scolded her for failing to conceive a child.

Maria Theresa was not just critical of Marie Antoinette. She disliked Leopold's reserve and often blamed him for being cold. She criticised Maria Carolina for her political activities, Ferdinand for his lack of organisation and Maria Amalia for her poor French and haughtiness. The only child she did not constantly scold was Maria Christina, who enjoyed her mother's complete confidence, though she failed to please her mother in one aspect—she did not produce any surviving children.

One of Maria Theresa's greatest wishes was to have as many grandchildren as possible, but she had only about two dozen at the time of her death, of which all the eldest surviving daughters were named after her, with the exception of Princess Carolina of Parma, her eldest granddaughter by Maria Amalia.

It is unlikely that Maria Theresa ever completely recovered from the smallpox attack in 1767, as 18th-century writers asserted. She suffered from shortness of breath, fatigue, cough, distress, necrophobia and insomnia. She later developed edema.

Maria Theresa fell ill on November 24, 1780. Her physician Dr. Störk thought her condition serious, although Joseph was confident that she would recover in no time. By November 26, she asked for the last rites, and on November 28, the doctor told her that the time had come. On November 29, she died surrounded by her remaining children. Her longtime rival Frederick the Great, on hearing of her death, said that she had honored her throne and her sex, and though he had fought against her in three wars, he never considered her his enemy. With her death, the House of Habsburg died out and was replaced by the House of Habsburg-Lorraine. Joseph, already co-sovereign of the Habsburg dominions, succeeded her, and introduced sweeping reforms in the empire; Joseph II produced nearly 700 edicts per year (or almost two per day), whereas Maria Theresa only issued about 100 edicts annually.

Maria Theresa understood the importance of her public *persona* and was able to simultaneously evoke both esteem and affection from her subjects; a notable example was how she projected dignity and simplicity to awe the people in Pressburg before she was crowned as the Queen of Hungary. Her 40-year reign was considered to be very successful when compared to other Habsburg rulers. Her reforms had transformed the empire into a modern state with a significant international standing. She centralised and modernised the institutions and her reign was considered as the beginning of the era of "enlightened absolutism" in Austria, with a brand new approach towards governing: the measures undertaken by rulers, became more modern and rational, and thoughts were given to the welfare of the state and the people. Many of her policies were not in line with the ideals of the Enlightenment (such as her support of torture) and she was still very much influenced by Catholicism from the previous era. Historians even stated that "taken as a whole the reforms of Maria Theresa appear more absolutist and centralist than enlightened, even if one must admit that the influence of enlightened ideas is visible to a certain degree".

Her body is buried in the Imperial Crypt in Vienna next to her husband in a coffin she had inscribed during her lifetime.

Apart of the terrible hoax concerning her death after stallion love-making, another terrific legend about Maria Theresa took place in Transylvania. On the territory of Vințu de Jos commune from Alba county

there are still the ruins of a famous castle a few hundred years ago, built by a governor of Transylvania, George Martinuzzi. There are many legends around the castle. One tells how Empress Maria Theresa killed her lovers. Another legend has in the foreground the Empress Maria Theresa and is located in the middle of the 18th century. The stories circulating in the area attribute several crimes to the empress, victims falling to the men with whom Maria Theresa had sex. "Maria Theresa entered the castle gate with the men, because then there was a water canal around it, and, after spending time with them, if she liked, she would take them to a room upstairs and invite her to enter. After the man crossed her threshold, the empress pulled on a lever and the floors were opened and the man fell into some swords that were placed with the tip up", says the legend. From the sword room there was a tunnel that communicated directly with the Mureş River where all the corpses reached the water. The researches carried out inside the castle did not confirm the existence of a hatch or a secret passage, as it has not been historically demonstrated the possibility that the famous empress once visited the Vinţu de Jos area. However, people in the area remember that during the construction of the road near the castle, a tunnel was discovered between Martinuzzi Castle and the Mureş River, which flows at a distance of less than 200 meters. The elders also tell how, during the summer storms, screams are heard both in the perimeter of the castle and at the exit of a cave located on a hill almost two kilometers away and which is said to have been one of the exits of safety of the castle. "The souls of the dead in the castle do not find peace." A hard-to-explain phenomenon occurred in August 1975, when, on a clear night, the castle was struck by lightning, the appearance of which was not explained by specialists not yet. The only part of the castle that remains intact is the pavilion where it is said that the Empress consumed her bodily pleasures with her lovers, whom she then sacrificed.

There was one man in Transylvania who was supposed to be the lover of the Empress but he was not killed by her! She even made him Governor of this rich province, famous for its gold mines, and spoiled him with a lot of valuable gifts. Valuable paintings by painters such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, are part of the collection collected by the "gentleman of Transylvania" Samuel von Brukenthal. Samuel von Brukenthal (1721-1803) was a man of the Enlightenment, a curious man inspired by encyclopedias, with Voltaire and the Brothers Grimm in his rich collection of books. Baron, a diplomat in Vienna, Brukenthal entered the graces of Empress Marie-Therese of Austria and became her lover, who offered her paintings as a gift. These paintings became the basis of Brukenthal's exceptional collection, consisting of over 1,200 paintings and canvases, a library of 16,000 books and a cabinet of curiosities containing two million objects. For this treasure, considered one of the most exceptional in Europe, the baron, once returned to his native lands, built a baroque castle in Hermannstadt, now Sibiu (in present day Romania). A true gastronomic culture was practiced in the palace that today houses one of the largest museums in Romania. The baron preferred the fresh ingredients, brought from the Avrig estate, the spring water from Răşinari but also the finest pastries, especially baked and brought from Vienna for the supposed eccentric lover of Maria Theresa.

The Lost Poem about "Vigorous Desire" of Frederick the Great

The discovery in 2011 of an erotic poem written by Frederick the Great reignited popular interest in the debate concerning Frederick's sexual being. Seemingly depicting a male-male tryst, the poem failed to end this undecided speculation. It did, however, reopen questions about how scholars have remembered and constructed Frederick's gender and sexuality, states Bodie A. Ashton, from the University of Passau.

These questions have been long time predicated upon incorrect assumptions regarding how the early modern Prussian state and society conceived of their monarch. While it is commonly argued that sex was considered a function of gender—thus marking same-sex-desiring men as "feminine"—the very concept of masculinity was governed by social cues and cultural expectations that extended far beyond sexual desire. As is argued in this analysis, Frederick's assumed homosexuality had no bearing on his

kingship; by his behaviour and public conduct he remained the epitome and embodiment of Prussian masculinity. The recent discovery in Berlin of a poem briefly reignited a long-running debate as to the sexual identity of the Prussian King Frederick II, better known by his sobriquet “Frederick the Great”. The poem, apparently describing a male–male tryst involving the king and one of his closest friends, made headlines around the world, declaring that evidence had been found that Frederick was homosexual. The impulsive response, however, masked the deeper complexities of the issue.

Using the debate concerning Frederick’s sexual identity as a starting point, Ashton aims to re-evaluate the king’s character through the prism of Prussian gender norms and ideals. It argues that Frederick the Great reigned not as an aberration but as a paragon of Prussian masculine virtue, a claim that was not in any significant way impinged on, or impeded by, his assumed same-sex desires. This argument is based on four key premises. First, Frederick either had conspicuous same-sex desires, or else he “coded” or “presented” as though he did. This was widely identified by his contemporaries and has since become a preoccupation among Frederick’s biographers. Second, Frederick’s apparent same-sex desires, while contrary to the letter of the law as well as conceptions of masculinity that developed among the Prussian bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, were hardly unusual for the time, and fit within the rubric of an Enlightenment sensibility that was particularly—if not uniquely—German. Third, though same-sex acts were ostensibly regulated by law in a draconian fashion, this did not necessarily subvert a man’s gender; a man could, in other words, feel and express same-sex desire while still being a man. Finally, the construction of masculinity within the Prussian state in the early modern period was a complex and multifaceted process that relied largely upon social and cultural cues set out in contemporaneous “manuals of masculinity”, known as the *Hausväterliteratur*, rather than biology and sex. In the final analysis, the Prussian king was expected to be the paragon of Prussian masculine virtue who followed the guiding principles of Prussian noble masculinity. Frederick the Great’s character as a sensitive romantic with (at the very least) homoerotic artistic tendencies did nothing to disqualify him from this role; in fact, the very characteristics that, from the nineteenth century to today, have marked him as being an outlier who practised “feminine” caprice, actually confirmed and consolidated his position as a virtuous Prussian man.

In 2011 a previously unknown poem, written by Frederick the Great, was discovered in a Berlin archive. Frederick was a prolific poet, though the reception of this body of work had been mixed. Voltaire, who enjoyed correspondence with the philosopher-king before going to live with him in Potsdam in 1752, had often chided him on his occasionally clumsy French transitions, while Thomas Babington Macaulay had dismissed his verses as vulgar and turgid.² Thomas Carlyle, on the other hand, thought Frederick’s attempts had significant artistic merit. Frederick himself, in a letter to the French philosopher Jean-Baptiste d’Alembert, dismissed his own poetry as the work of a “dilettante” while d’Alembert’s work would endure in artistic immortality; his one hope was that his work was lyrical enough to send d’Alembert to sleep. In another earlier letter to Voltaire, Frederick wrote: “Do not, at least, suppose that I write in verse purposely to enter the lists with you. I stammering answer in a language which Voltaire and the Gods only are allowed to speak”.

Yet it was neither the existence nor quality of the poem that caused excitement, so much as its content. Written shortly after Frederick had ascended to the Prussian throne in 1740, it was addressed to Frederick’s friend and courtier, the diplomat and libertine Count Francesco Algarotti (here addressed by the affectionate nickname, “Swan of Padua”). Entitled *La Jouissance—The Pleasure*, or more accurately, *The Orgasm*—the poem is an exercise in eighteenth-century erotic verse. One of Frederick’s biographers, the historian Giles MacDonogh, provided a translation for the History Today website shortly after the original text was published in full in the German newspaper *Die Zeit*:

This night, vigorous desire in full measure,