

Tim Blanning

The representation of Frederick II and George III: a comparison

<1>

Accounts of the representation of European sovereigns usually take their lead from Jürgen Habermas's influential work *The structural transformation of the public sphere*, first published in 1962.¹ At the centre of his analysis is the relationship between what is regarded as public and what is regarded as private. In the Middle Ages, he argues, there was no clear distinction between public and private because there was no clear concept of private property.² Those who exercised power - monarch, nobles, prelates - expressed their status in public in a concrete, non-abstract way, through insignia, clothing, gesture, or rhetoric. Power was both exercised and represented (in the sense of 'being made present') directly: 'as long as the prince and the estates of the realm still "are" the land, instead of merely functioning as deputies for it, they are able to "re-present"; they represent their power "before" the people, instead of for the people'.³

<2>

This is representational culture⁴. Confined to those who exercise power, it assumes an entirely passive attitude on the part of the rest of the population. It reached its apogee in the courtly-chivalric court-culture of France and Burgundy in the fifteenth century, but it lived on through the early modern period, transforming itself into the baroque. By now, however, representation had become more confined, moving from the streets of the city to the parks and state apartments of the château. In a bourgeois house even the ceremonial rooms are designed to be lived in; in a baroque château, even the living rooms have a ceremonial purpose. Indeed, especially in France, the most intimate – the bedroom – is also the most important.

<3>

The sumptuous display of the representational public sphere was not supposed to be recreational or self-indulgent, its purpose was to represent the power of the sovereign before the people. So the sovereign had to be on parade even when he was eating - the people were still allowed to watch. It was only bourgeois banquets which became entirely private.⁵ There was a corresponding change in the role of the nobility during

¹ Jürgen Habermas: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuwied am Rhein 1962; English translation: *The structural transformation of the public sphere. An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, Cambridge, 1989. It was translated into French in 1978 as *L'Espace public: archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société*, Paris 1978.

² Habermas: *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (as n. 1), 5.

³ Habermas: *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (as n. 1), 8.

⁴ The translator prefers the English 'representative' but this seems to me to be positively misleading.

⁵ Habermas: *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (as n. 1), 10. Much of Habermas' historical information is drawn from R. Alewyn: *Das große Welttheater. Die Epoche der höfischen Feste*, Hamburg 1959.

the early modern period, as the decentralised feudal empires made way for centralised absolutist states. In the feudal period, the nobles represented their own power before the people. Indeed it was difficult to say when a noble was a sovereign and vice versa, the king or emperor being only *primus inter pares*. However, the concentration of power in the person of the sovereign in the form of absolutism meant that now the nobles were required to represent not their own power before the people but that of the sovereign.⁶

<4>

Representation is seen by Habermas, and the legion of historians influenced by him, very much as top-down, as a power-political tool in the hands of the sovereign to enhance his or her legitimacy. Writing about Louis XIV, Peter Burke has observed: 'ritual, art and architecture may all be seen as the instruments of self-assertion, as the continuation of war and diplomacy by other means'⁷. He also quotes Montesquieu approvingly: 'the magnificence and splendour which surround kings form part of their power'.⁸ The multi-media exercise that was Versailles proved to be an enduring model for rulers great and small across Europe.

<5>

Such an approach has proved immensely fruitful for our understanding of early modern Europe. Few branches of historical scholarship have thrived as mightily in the past generation or so as court studies.⁹ However, it might also be rewarding to pay less attention to the political needs of the regime and more to the emotional needs of the person being represented. Over-emphasis on the function of a culture can allow some important subjective aspects to be missed. A comparison of the very different ways in which Frederick II of Prussia and George III of England chose to present themselves shows that representation could also be about coming to terms with a difficult inheritance. Representation could also be therapy.

<6>

In the case of Frederick, his childhood, adolescence and early manhood were about as abusive as it is possible to imagine. A large part of the problem stemmed from his father Frederick William I's hereditary affliction, porphyria. In many transmitters it lies dormant or is so mild as to escape detection, but in this case the disease unleashed its full fury. He suffered four major attacks, in 1707, in 1718 and 1734, nearly dying on both occasions, and finally in 1740 when he did die, at the age of 52.¹⁰ In between times, he was prone to less disabling but still frightful bouts. Some idea of the symptoms can be gained from the expressions used by contemporaries to describe them: 'fainting fits', 'restlessness', 'delusions', 'insanity', 'foolish fantasies'

⁶ Habermas: The structural transformation of the public sphere (as n. 1), 10.

⁷ Peter Burke: The fabrication of Louis XIV, New Haven 1992, 65.

⁸ Burke: The fabrication of Louis XIV (as n. 7), 5.

⁹ The best way in is through the distinguished collection edited by John Adamson: The princely courts of Europe. Ritual, politics and culture under the Ancien Régime 1500-1750, London, 1999, especially his own introductory chapter 'The making of the Ancien Régime court 1500-1700'.

¹⁰ Claus A. Pierach / Erich Jennewein: Friedrich Wilhelm I. und Porphyrie, in: Sudhoffs Archiv. Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftsgeschichte 83, 1 (1999), 52.

and, especially, 'explosions of rage'. At its peak, porphyria scourged him with insomnia alternating with nightmares, paranoia, swollen genitalia (which made urination impossible), constipation alternating with diarrhoea, great blisters full of water, foaming at the mouth, and intense abdominal pain. The related affliction of gout was also a frequent visitor.¹¹ In October 1734 Frederick reported from Potsdam to his sister Wilhelmine that their father was in a terrible condition: his legs were swollen right up to the top of his thighs, his feet between calf and toes were bright scarlet and filled with pus, his arms and face were terribly emaciated, his face was yellow and covered in blue spots and he could barely eat or drink so great was the pain.¹²

<7>

How much of Frederick William's coarse behaviour was due to his personality and how much was a reaction to physical pain obviously cannot be determined. It seems likely, however, that he would have been a difficult parent even if he had enjoyed the best of health. His aggressively intolerant piety, domineering personality, militarism, contempt for intellectuals and addiction to hunting would all have made him a problematic parent. Yet for all his boorishness, Frederick William was no fool. Sharp-witted, energetic and determined, he was a man who made things happen – usually the way he wanted. He even had a sensitive side, best expressed in the painting to which he resorted to fill his sleepless nights and to ease his physical aches and pains, labelling the finished work '*Fredericus Wilhelmus in tormentis pinxit*' [painted by Frederick William in his torment].¹³ An expressive self-portrait reveals both talent and suffering.¹⁴

<8>

It is not possible to establish precisely when Frederick William began to realise that his best-laid plans for his son and heir were going awry. Little Frederick turned out to be crafty as well as clever, adept at feigning interest in all the things his father loved but he hated, notably hunting, drilling, shooting and commanding the company of 130 cadets created for him when he was just six years old.¹⁵ Certainly by 1724 the father had begun to smell a rat, saying: 'I would very much like to know what is going on in that little head. I am well aware that Fritz doesn't share my tastes and I also know there are people who have filled him up with contrary notions and who rubbish everything I do'.¹⁶ It was in 1724 that foreign diplomats began to report incidents of paternal disapproval of what was judged to be 'effeminacy' – the wearing of gloves when hunting on a cold day, for example, or the use of a silver three-pronged fork rather than the steel two-pronged

¹¹ Pierach / Jennewein: Friedrich Wilhelm I. und Porphyrie (as n. 10), 53-61.

¹² Gustav Berthold Volz (ed.): Friedrich der Große und Wilhelmine von Bayreuth. Vol. 1: Jugendbriefe 1728–1740, Leipzig 1924, 248.

¹³ Thomas Carlyle: History of Friedrich II of Prussia called Frederick the Great vol. 2, London 1865, 55.

¹⁴ I have been unable to find a good colour reproduction. There is a black-and-white reproduction in Christian Graf von Krockow: Die preußischen Brüder. Prinz Heinrich und Friedrich der Große. Ein Doppelporträt, Stuttgart 1996, 14.

¹⁵ Theodor Schieder: Friedrich der Große. Ein Königtum der Widersprüche, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna 1983, 27.

¹⁶ Reinhold Koser: Friedrich der Große als Kronprinz, Stuttgart 1886, 26.

implement favoured by soldiers.¹⁷ In 1726 Frederick was transferred to Potsdam to be a captain in the King's Own Regiment, a move which meant much greater emphasis on military matters in his education with a correspondingly austere life-style and an end to what little 'comfort or pleasure' [*Commodité oder Plaisir*] he had enjoyed hitherto. Falling off his horse on the parade ground in front of his father dramatised the failure to turn him into a model soldier.¹⁸ Religion was also a divisive issue. Frederick himself probably could not have said when he began to have doubts about the Christian faith that was thrust down his throat on a daily basis. For a mind with little natural inclination to 'metaphysical fiction', as Frederick later defined Christianity, such force-feeding was probably counter-productive.

<9>

Although conceivable that somewhere at some time a father has enjoyed a consistently harmonious relationship with his adolescent son, it is not a phenomenon often recorded. In the case of Frederick William and Frederick, the natural tensions of the latter's teenage years went way beyond what was normal to reach physical violence and climaxed with a near-filicide. It was a sustained campaign to break Frederick's will and turn him into a subservient instrument. The technique was brutal: Frederick William never praised his son, never showed him any affection and treated him worse than he did his court buffoons.¹⁹ An army-hating, free-thinking, effeminate spendthrift was the son of Frederick William's nightmares. So long as his defects were concealed behind a façade of obedience, some sort of *modus vivendi* could be achieved. This became more difficult as Frederick became both more restless and more assertive. A watershed was reached with the royal visit to the Saxon capital Dresden in January 1728.

<10>

The contrast between Augustus the Strong's hedonistic, not to say decadent, court, and the grim austerity at home could not have been greater. Frederick enjoyed at least three experiences for the first time. He attended his first opera, Johann Adolf Hasse's *Cleofide*, one of the finest *opera seria* ever written. Also for the first time he heard flute playing of virtuoso standard, by Johann Joachim Quantz.²⁰ Last but not least, he probably had his first heterosexual experience. The four weeks he spent in Dresden revealed to Frederick just how narrow, parochial and philistine was the 'culture' to be found at home. As he returned to the dreary round of regimental duties at Potsdam under the ever-watchful eye of his brutal father, how Frederick must have wished to escape his iron cage. A minor but indicative sign that the worm was beginning to turn was his habit of signing his letters '*Frédéric le philosophe*', which began while he was in Dresden.²¹ A move towards

¹⁷ Ernest Lavis: The youth of Frederick the Great. Trans. Mary Bushnell Coleman, Chicago 1892, 130.

¹⁸ Arnold Berney: Friedrich der Große. Entwicklungsgeschichte eines Staatsmannes, Tübingen 1934, 13.

¹⁹ Jürgen Luh: Der Große. Friedrich II. von Preußen, Berlin 2012, 114.

²⁰ Heinz Becker: 'Friedrich II': Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, ed. Friedrich Blume, vol. 4, Kassel and Basle 1955, 955; Eugene Helm / Derek McCulloch: 'Frederick II, King of Prussia [Friedrich II; Frederick the Great]', <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10176?q=frederick+prussia&search=quick&pos=1&start=1#firsthit> <11.04.2012>.

²¹ Reinhold Koser: Friedrich der Große als Kronprinz, Stuttgart 1886, 10.

greater assertiveness can also be inferred from his father's increasingly intemperate behaviour. There is general agreement among Frederick's biographers that the Dresden visit was followed by a sharp deterioration in relations.²²

<11>

1730, the year in which Frederick turned eighteen, proved to be the crisis year. The future was as bleak as could be. Frederick William I was only 42 in 1730, his father had lived to be 55 and his grandfather to be 68, so there was little hope in the medium-term that a natural death would bring liberation. Probably the last straw was Frederick William's boast that, whereas some people were comforting Frederick with the prediction that his father would mellow as he grew older, in reality he was determined to treat his son ever more harshly, adding grimly: 'and you know I am a man of my word'. On another occasion, Frederick William added insult to injury by sneering that if he had been treated in the same manner by his own father, he would have shot himself. The physical abuse also intensified. On a visit to Radewitz in Saxony in May 1730, Frederick William punched Frederick in the face, tore his hair and then made him pass across the parade ground so that everyone could witness the visible effects of his humiliation.²³ Frederick never seems to have considered the most obvious solution – regicide, but he did plan to run away, first to France and from there to England.

<12>

The attempted escape on 5 August 1730 near Mannheim on the Rhine was a fiasco, frustrated even before it started. Arrested, placed in solitary confinement and interrogated again and again, Frederick was allowed to think that his life was in danger. In the event, he was spared, but not before he had been obliged to watch the beheading of his close friend Lieutenant von Katte, who had assisted the abortive flight. When the army chaplain entered Frederick's cell to inform him that the execution was about to occur, he thought that it was he himself who was to be the victim.²⁴ As the axe fell on Katte, a hysterical Frederick fell unconscious into the arms of his warders. In close attendance was an army chaplain, under orders from Frederick William to take advantage of this anticipated mental breakdown to lead his son back to the consoling embrace of Christianity.²⁵

<13>

Frederick's rehabilitation was long and painfully humiliating. Obligated to confess his faults again and again, he was impeccably submissive, greeting his father's final pronouncement of forgiveness by falling to the floor

²² For example, Carlyle: *History of Friedrich II of Prussia* (as n. 13), 27; Berney: *Friedrich der Große* (as n. 18), 13; Johannes Kunisch: *Friedrich der Große. Der König und seine Zeit*, Munich 2004, 23.

²³ Koser: *Friedrich der Große als Kronprinz* (as n. 21), 29–38.

²⁴ Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann: *Vom rebellischen Sohn zum Landesvater. Der Herrscher zwischen Familie und Staat*, in: Bernd Sösemann / Gregor Vogt-Spira (eds.): *Friedrich der Große in Europa*, vol. 1, Stuttgart 2012, 14.

²⁵ Schieder: *Friedrich der Große* (as n. 15), 40.

weeping and kissing his feet.²⁶ The final act was marriage to his father's choice, Elizabeth of Brunswick-Bevern in 1733. Now with his own establishment, first at Ruppin and then at Rheinsberg, he could begin to regain his self-respect and to assert his own identity against the overpowering personality of his father. First and foremost was culture in all its forms. Freed from a diet of Christian piety, Frederick turned back to reading the sort of books Frederick William had confiscated and sold in 1730. As he had no Latin, thanks to his father's directive that he should not be taught anything so useless²⁷, little English, and used German only with his social inferiors, this meant that everything had to be in the French language. It was in French translation that Frederick read the Greek and Roman classics, along with English and even German philosophy. It can also be assumed that French wine, banished on the express orders of Frederick William in 1730, returned to his dining table.²⁸

<14>

Frederick was also now able to devote to music the attention he believed it deserved. Music for him was much more than an agreeable recreation and something to entertain the private man in moments of leisure. Throughout his life, he saw it as an integral part of who he was and what he did. He identified himself with Apollo, the charismatic protector of scholarship and art in general and music in particular. It was an identification which ran through his work as a leitmotiv.²⁹ In 1738 he wrote an eloquent letter to the Count of Schaumburg-Lippe, stressing the centrality of music to a true nobleman's existence and his active life. He contrasted this with those contemptible Spanish nobles who believed idleness to be the true mark of gentility. Music, Frederick maintained, was unique in its ability to communicate emotions and speak to soul.³⁰ No sooner had he arrived at Ruppin than he set about forming a band of instrumentalists and singers.

<15>

During the late 1730s, Frederick represented himself in two ways. On the one hand, he now did what his father had always wanted and turned himself into a diligent and efficient soldier. So diligently indeed, that by 1734 the notoriously demanding Frederick William singled out his regiment for special praise following the annual review of 1734 and actually embraced him after the same event the following year. Shortly after this last accolade, Frederick was promoted to Major General.³¹ On the other hand, with the help of his friend Knobelsdorff he set about creating for himself a comfortable not to say luxurious environment at Rheinsberg. While his father was still alive this had to be officially a heterosexual world. Immediately adjacent to Frederick's quarters was the apartment of his wife, who joined him at Rheinsberg on 20 August 1736. Her

²⁶ Protokoll über die Zusammenkunft Sr. Majestät des Königs mit dem Kronprinzen K.H. in Cüstrin den 15. August 1731, in: Friedrich Förster: Friedrich Wilhelm I. König von Preußen, vol. III, Potsdam 1835, 50.

²⁷ J.D.E. Preuss: Friedrichs des Großen Jugend und Thronbesteigung, Berlin 1840, 34.

²⁸ Koser: Friedrich der Große als Kronprinz (as n. 21), 82.

²⁹ Sabine Henze-Döhring: Friedrich der Große. Musiker und Monarch, Munich 2012, 12–14. This is one of the shorter books published to mark the bicentenary of Frederick's birth but also one of the most important.

³⁰ Henze-Döhring: Friedrich der Große (as n. 29), 11. The full passage in French is included in footnote 8 on page 202.

³¹ Koser: Friedrich der Große als Kronprinz (as n. 21), 197.

bedroom was dominated by a massive ornate bed, a gift from her father-in-law.³² Frederick William was anxious that it be put to good and immediate use. A year earlier he had sent Elizabeth Christine a birthday present with a note: 'Madame, as today is your birthday, I congratulate you with my whole heart and wish you a long life and in a few months time a plump and bonny baby son [*einen dicken wackeren Jungen*]'.³³

<16>

During the four years at Rheinsberg, Frederick was at pains to present his marriage as entirely normal. Two letters written during a journey with his father to East Prussia in the summer of 1739, however, hint at a certain amount of play-acting. In a letter to Elizabeth Christine of 27 July which was to be passed on to his mother, Frederick went out of his way to emphasise his affection, as in: 'I very much look forward to being back in Rheinsberg and even more to the pleasure of kissing you... May God protect you, my lady! Please do not forget me, and permit me to embrace you with all my heart, be sure that I am totally devoted to you'. But a letter written two weeks later, which he expressly stated was *not* to be shown to his mother, was appreciably less fulsome, ending simply with 'your most obedient servant'.³⁴ As soon as Frederick William died, the tone became much sharper. The very first letter he wrote to his wife as king, on 31 May 1740, issued curt instructions as to when and where she was to go and what she was to do, signing off with 'I have no time to tell you anything more. Goodbye'. Any hopes Elizabeth Christine may have had of becoming Queen in Prussia in anything more than name were dashed by another letter the very next day:

Madame, when you arrive [in Berlin] you will go first to the Queen [Mother] to pay your respects, and you will try to make a better job of it than in the past [*vous tâcherez d'en faire encore plus qu'autrefois*]; after that you may remain here, your presence being necessary, until I write to tell you what to do. You will see few or no people. Tomorrow I shall decide on the mourning to be observed by the women and shall send details to you. Farewell, I trust that I shall have the pleasure to find you in good health³⁵.

<17>

So the new queen was left on the sidelines, publicly humiliated by her brutal subordination to her mother-in-law. 'You can have no idea of what I have to suffer', she wrote to her brother Duke Karl of Brunswick on 28 June 1740, 'God alone knows and only God can help me'.³⁶ Frederick packed her off to Schönhausen, a modest residence in what is now the Pankow district in the north of Berlin. It compared very unfavourably

³² Ernst Posseck: Die Kronprinzessin. Elisabeth Christine, Gemahlin Friedrichs des Großen geborene Prinzessin von Braunschweig-Bevern, Berlin 1943, 355.

³³ Karin Feuerstein-Prasser: "Ich bleibe zurück wie eine Gefangene". Elisabeth Christine und Friedrich der Große, Regensburg 2011, 39.

³⁴ Correspondance de Frédéric II roi de Prusse, vol. 1, Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand, vol. 26, Berlin 1850, 7, 10 <http://friedrich.uni-trier.de/de/oeuvres/16/toc/> <21.02.2013>. In all the letters he wrote to Wilhelmine from Rheinsberg he did not mention his wife once, not even when reporting the comings and goings of guests and the entertainments they had enjoyed - Volz: Friedrich der Große und Wilhelmine von Bayreuth (as n. 12), passim.

³⁵ Correspondance de Frédéric II, vol. 26 (as n. 34), 14 <http://friedrich.uni-trier.de/de/oeuvres/26/14-o2> <21.2.2013>.

³⁶ Quoted in Feuerstein-Prasser: "Ich bleibe zurück wie eine Gefangene" (as n. 33), 53.

with the Queen Mother's palace of Monbijou. At Schönhausen she formed her own little court and eked out what was clearly a lonely and frustrated existence. In March 1744 she wrote to her cousin Ferdinand of Brunswick:

I remain stuck in this old chateau like a prisoner, while the others have fun. I entertain myself with reading, work and music, and it is always a high day for me when I get a letter from you – that puts me in a happy frame of mind for the whole day, and the time I spend writing to you is a time of relaxation.³⁷

<18>

Frederick's neglect can only be described as studied, contemptuous and spiteful. That was revealed most clearly by an episode in the summer of 1748. To celebrate the completion of a new wing at the Charlottenburg Palace, Frederick planned a festival for all the family – bar one. For although the Queen Mother expressly stated that she would have no objection if her daughter-in-law attended, the Queen was not invited. Frederick explained why in a letter to his brother August Wilhelm: 'If my hypersensitive grouch of a wife joins the expedition to Charlottenburg, I'm afraid she will spoil the whole occasion'. His further comment that there was no adequate accommodation was particularly disingenuous, for protocol had required that a whole suite of rooms in the new wing be assigned to the Queen. In a passage reeking of misogyny, Frederick concluded:

Anyway, what would we do with the swarm of chambermaids and court ladies etc. if my delicate better half were to be resident at Charlottenburg? How could we feed this incorrigibly sour sub-species of the female sex and accommodate all the riff-raff who mill around court establishments. What we want to do is to entertain our mother with an excursion and rural amusements. Let's stick to that resolution and not mix nettles and weeds in among the jasmine and the roses.³⁸

<19>

Frederick never visited his wife at Schönhausen and never permitted her to visit him. The only time she saw Sanssouci was when she passed through Potsdam in the autumn of 1757 when being evacuated to Magdeburg to escape the invading Austrians. As her chamberlain Count Lehndorff confided acidly to his diary, it was odd that it needed the Empress Maria Theresa to send an army to Berlin to give the Queen of Prussia the opportunity of seeing her husband's favourite residence.³⁹

<20>

After 1740 Frederick had both the means and opportunity to complete the representational refashioning begun at Rheinsberg. A number of luxurious building projects were begun at Charlottenburg, Berlin and

³⁷ Feuerstein-Prasser: "Ich bleibe zurück wie eine Gefangene" (as n. 33), 62.

³⁸ Feuerstein-Prasser: "Ich bleibe zurück wie eine Gefangene" (as n. 33), 67–68.

³⁹ Karl Eduard Schmidt-Lotzen (ed.): Dreissig Jahre am Hofe Friedrichs des Großen. Aus den Tagebüchern des Reichsgrafen Ernst Ahasverus Heinrich von Lehndorff, Kammerherrn der Königin Elisabeth Christine von Preußen, vol. 1, Gotha 1907, 359.

Potsdam, including the largest free-standing opera-house in Europe. The musical establishment was greatly expanded. The Academy was refounded and leading intellectuals, mostly French, were attracted to Prussia with generous salaries and terms of employment. Frederick was at pains to present himself to the world as a writer who could compete with the philosophes on their own terms.

<21>

He also celebrated release from his father's prison-camp with his own sexual liberation. Among his first actions as king was the purchase of a landed estate at Zernickow near Rheinsberg for his valet Michael Gabriel Fredersdorf. Described by Voltaire as '*le grand factotum du roi Frédéric*', he became one of the most powerful individuals at the court. Count Lehndorff recorded in his diary how he found 'the famous Fredersdorf' at Potsdam acting as a kind of 'prime minister', surrounded by the high and the mighty paying court to him and his antechamber filled with supplicants.⁴⁰ As this suggested, if you wanted something done at the court of King Frederick, Fredersdorf was the man to see. Not unnaturally, the tongues at court wagged. Count Lehndorff asked rhetorically how a totally common man with no education 'from the back-end of Pomerania' had been able to rise to be second man in the kingdom, the only one after the king who could give orders and who often abused his power in a despotic fashion? The answer he confided to his diary, was simply Fredersdorf's 'very pretty face' [*sehr hübsches Gesicht*].⁴¹ Although there is no unequivocal evidence of a sexual relationship, there can be no doubt that Frederick felt very strong affection. Fredersdorf was one of the six men Frederick identified in 1741 as 'those I have loved the most during my life' [*ceux que j'ai le plus aimés pendant ma vie*].⁴²

<22>

Another beneficiary of Frederick's sexual liberation was the Italian man of letters Francesco Algarotti, whom Frederick first met in 1739 at Rheinsberg when he visited in the company of the English peer Lord Baltimore. Born in the same year as Frederick, Algarotti was the son of a rich Venetian merchant and had studied at Bologna and Florence before embarking on a European tour. In London he had been involved in a bizarre *ménage à trois* with Lord Hervey (son of the Earl of Bristol) and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (daughter of the Duke of Kingston), who were not only involved in an intermittent adulterous relationship with each other but were both bi-sexual – and both in love with Algarotti. Both Lord Hervey and Lady Mary, however, were outbid when Algarotti met Frederick. According to Marc Fumaroli, this was love at first sight, a *coup de foudre* for both parties. Algarotti wrote to Voltaire: 'I have seen, *oh me beato*, this adorable prince... I cannot put in words the number of pleasures I have experienced!'⁴³ For his part, Frederick was, if anything, even more effusive. No sooner had Algarotti departed after a sojourn of just eight days than he fired off letter after letter

⁴⁰ Schmidt-Lotzen: Dreissig Jahre am Hofe Friedrichs des Großen (as n. 39), 359–360.

⁴¹ Schmidt-Lotzen: Dreissig Jahre am Hofe Friedrichs des Großen (as n. 39), 360.

⁴² Frederick to his brother August Wilhelm, Pogarell, 8 April 1741, Correspondance de Frédéric avec son frère le prince de Prusse, Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand, vol. 26, Berlin 1855, 99 <http://friedrich.uni-trier.de/de/oeuvres/26/99-o2/> <21.02.2013>.

⁴³ Marc Fumaroli: Francesco Algarotti et Frédéric II, in: Marc Fumaroli: Quand l'Europe parlait français, Paris 2001, 150.

to his 'swan of Padua'. In his third letter, dated 1 September 1739, he exclaimed: 'Happy are the men who can enjoy the company of clever people [*gens d'esprit*]! Happier still are the princes who can possess them!' Frederick William I died on 31 May 1740. On 2 June Frederick wrote to Algarotti: 'My dear Algarotti, my lot has changed. I await you with impatience; please don't make me pine. Frederick.' He added a postscript in verse:

Come, Algarotti, from the banks of the Thames
Share with us our happy destiny.
Hasten to reach this pleasant place,
Where you will find liberty is our watchword.

This is to let you know that four days ago Frederick II succeeded Frederick William.

All his people with us feel no joy,
He alone, as a loving son, is prey to grief,
Caring little for the attractions of such a flattering destiny,
He deserves to be loved and to reign over your heart.⁴⁴

Frederick then added a line of Latin - *Ne gaudia igitur nostra moreris. Algarotti venturo, Phosphore, redde diem*, which is an adaptation of Martial's epigram VIII/21 and can be translated as 'Don't delay our rejoicing. Algarotti return, Morning Star bring back the day'. The Morning Star is, of course, Venus. On 7 July 1740 the two men set off for Königsberg for Frederick's coronation as 'King in Prussia'. In 1701 his grandfather Frederick I had needed 30,000 horses and 1,800 carriages to transport the Electoral family, court and retainers and the whole expedition cost 6,000,000 talers, or about twice the total annual revenue of the state.⁴⁵ Frederick took just three coaches and spent next to nothing.⁴⁶ Sitting in the royal coach alongside the king was Algarotti 'like a royal mistress'.⁴⁷ Needless to say, the Queen was not a member of the party. On their return later that month, Algarotti wrote to his brother that the king 'gave me countless caresses [*infinite carezze*], and honoured me in a thousand different ways'.⁴⁸ Among the latter were appointment as Chevalier of the newly created Order '*Pour le Mérite*', the title of 'Chamberlain' [*Kammerherr*] and elevation to the nobility as Count, an honour that was also granted to Algarotti's brother. These were accompanied by expensive presents of porcelain, watches and snuff-boxes decorated with diamonds.⁴⁹

<23>

In summary, Frederick represented himself as all the things his father was not: a refined, sophisticated,

⁴⁴ Heinrich Menu von Minutoli (ed.): *Correspondance de Frédéric Second Roi de Pruss avec le comte Algarotti*, Berlin 1837, 16.

⁴⁵ Christopher Clark: *Iron Kingdom. The rise and downfall of Prussia 1600–1947*, London 2006, 67–68.

⁴⁶ Reinhold Koser: *König Friedrich der Große*, vol. 1, 3, Stuttgart, Berlin 1904, 30.

⁴⁷ Fumaroli: *Francesco Algarotti et Frédéric II* (as n. 43), 150.

⁴⁸ Rita Unfer Lukoschik / Ivan Miatto: *Lettere prussiane di Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764)*, Padua 2011, 56.

⁴⁹ Domenico Michelessi: *Mémoires concernant la vie et les écrits du comte François Algarotti*, Berlin 1772, 133.

cultured, free-thinking, musical, intellectual homosexual who hated hunting. The identity he created for himself may also have been ‘the continuation of war and diplomacy by other means’⁵⁰, but primarily it was a means of coming to terms with his past. There was only one aspect of his father’s persona that he came to admire – his militarism, and that he pursued with a determination and brilliance unlike anything that had gone before.

<24>

For his near-relation George III (Frederick’s mother Sophia Dorothea was the sister of George’s grandfather George II), representation played a role that was both very different in detail and quite similar in motivation. George’s own paternal relations could not have been more different from those of his Prussian relations. His father, Frederick Prince of Wales, was a reasonably dutiful husband, a gifted musician and fond of amateur theatricals. The few letters that have survived between father and son reveal a mutually affectionate relationship.⁵¹ Perhaps crucially, George had not yet reached puberty when his father died suddenly in 1751 at the age of forty-four. So he knew none of the generational conflicts inseparable from teenage years, retaining only a happy memory that could only become more idealised as reality faded.⁵² Instead, all his adolescent resentments were directed towards his grandfather, whom he knew to have been at daggers drawn with his parents. Brought up at Leicester House by his strong-willed mother, the Princess Dowager Augusta, George came to demonise everything he thought George II stood for.

<25>

A crucial role was played by his tutor, the Earl of Bute, who became a substitute father, mentor and close friend. An earnest and high-minded man, Bute succeeded in impressing on his pupil the need for earnest and high-minded politics. The surviving correspondence between mentor and royal pupil reveal clearly the counter-image of kingship the teenaged George created in contradistinction to his grandfather. In June 1757 he told Bute:

I would only accept it [the Crown] with the hopes of restoring my much loved country to her antient state of liberty; of seeing her in time free from her present load of debts and again famous for being the residence of true piety and virtue, I say if these hopes were lost, I should with an eye of pleasure look on retiring to some uninhabited cavern as that would prevent me from seeing the sufferings of my countrymen, and the total destruction of this Monarchy.⁵³

<26>

Patriotism, liberty, economy and piety: these were to be George’s watchwords throughout his long reign. Only the second of these proved controversial, for George’s conception did not always coincide with that of

⁵⁰ See above <4>.

⁵¹ John Brooke: *George III*, London 1972, 22–25.

⁵² ‘Much of George III’s reign would be a reprise in more favourable circumstances of what Frederick attempted to do before his early death in 1751’ - Linda Colley: *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, London, New Haven 1992, 206.

⁵³ Romney Sedgwick (ed.): *Letters from George III to Lord Bute 1756–1766*, London 1939, 6.

the professional politicians.⁵⁴ In his view, the crown had been allowed by the current incumbent to fall into the hands of 'mirmidons of the blackest kind'. In November he gloomily told Bute: 'I begin now to think that you and I my Friend shall see the end of this once great and glorious country'.⁵⁵ He had been prepared for his self-appointed role as a patriot king by his father, who, although Hanoverian born and bred, had been quick to wrap himself in the British flag when he arrived in 1728. In 1749 he composed an introduction for a performance of Joseph Addison's play *Cato* to be declaimed by his son and heir:

Should this superior to my years be thought,
Know – 'tis the first great lesson I was taught.
What, tho' a boy! It may with truth be said,
A boy in *England* born, in England bred,
should be A boy in *England* born, in England bred
Where freedom best becomes the earliest state,
For there the love of liberty's innate.⁵⁶

<27>

This involved a demonstrative attachment to England as opposed to the Hanover George II so blatantly preferred. Commenting on the problematic military situation in Westphalia in the summer of 1759, Prince George commented: 'I fear this is entir'ly owing to the partiality ----- [George II] has for that horrid Electorate which has always liv'd upon the very vitals of this poor Country'.⁵⁷ It is no exaggeration to say that he hated and despised his grandfather: 'You will see by H.M. letter how shuffling it is and unworthy of a British Monarch; the conduct of this old K. makes me asham'd of being his grandson'.⁵⁸ In his first speech from the throne, delivered on 18 November 1760, he proclaimed that 'born and educated in this country, I glory in the name of Britain'. The speech had been drafted by Lord Hardwicke, but it was George who had insisted that this sentence be included⁵⁹. Moreover, this patriotism was entirely genuine: in a private letter signalling his acceptance that he could not marry Lady Sarah Lennox, for whom he nursed a strong passion, he wrote: 'the interest of my country must ever be my first care, my own inclinations shall submit to it; I am born for the happiness or misery of a great nation, and must consequently often act contrary to my passions'⁶⁰. Hanover was now demoted to peripheral status, as George explained in 1762: 'tho' I have subjects who will suffer immensely whenever this Kingdom withdraws its protection from thence [Hanover], yet so superior is my love

⁵⁴ I have discussed this controversial topic in Tim Blanning: *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture. Old Regime Europe 1660–1789*, Oxford 2002, in a section entitled 'George III: the political education of a patriot king', pp. 322–56. As the events of 1783–84 were to show, it was George's view which enjoyed the support of British public opinion.

⁵⁵ Sedgwick: *Letters from George III* (as n. 53), 7.

⁵⁶ Sedgwick: *Letters from George III* (as n. 53), ix–x.

⁵⁷ Sedgwick: *Letters from George III* (as n. 53), 28.

⁵⁸ Sedgwick: *Letters from George III* (as n. 53), 26–27.

⁵⁹ Brooke: *George III* (as n. 51), 88. There has been some confusion as to whether George said 'Britain' or 'Briton'. Brooke states firmly that the original draft quite clearly shows 'Britain' in the king's hand, but it was reported as 'Briton' – Brooke: *George III* (as n. 51), 390 n. 7.

⁶⁰ Quoted in J. Steven Watson: *The reign of George III 1760–1815*, Oxford 1960, 6.

for this my native country over any private interest of my own that I cannot help wishing that an end was put to that enormous expence by ordering our troops home'⁶¹.

<28>

A special problem was sex. All English high society knew about George II's mistresses, most notoriously Amalie Sophie Marianne von Wallmoden, whom he had met in Hanover in 1735 and whose portrait he 'caused... to be hung up opposite to his bed's feet'.⁶² After the death of Queen Caroline in 1737 she moved to London, where she was given apartments at St. James's and Kensington Palaces, was made a peeress as Countess of Yarmouth and was given the princely annual pension of £4,000 from the Irish revenues. On her death she left her son (reportedly fathered by George II) the colossal fortune of two million crowns.⁶³ Unsurprisingly, Prince George was horrified by his grandfather's immorality, primly denouncing mistresses: 'Princes when once in their hands make miserable figures, the annals of France and the present situation of Government in the Kingdom I the most love, are convincing proofs of [*sic*']'.⁶⁴ This declaration was made at a time when he himself was experiencing 'a daily encreasing admiration of the fair sex, which I am attempting with all the phylosophy and resolution I am capable of to keep under'. He told Bute that he had resisted resolutely the numerous temptations to which the heir to the throne was exposed on a daily basis and expressed the pious hope that he would go on keeping the upper hand in the struggle 'between the boiling youth of 21 years and prudence'.⁶⁵ The solution of course was marriage but 'whilst this Old Man lives' he would not contemplate a match in which the King would have a say.⁶⁶

<29>

Less than a year later the Old Man did die and George could start putting right all that had gone wrong with his life since the death of his beloved father. This involved the creation of a style of representation that was the opposite of his grandfather's. In the place of sexual promiscuity came strict monogamy. Eight months after his accession, George married Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and set about procreation with a will, fathering fifteen healthy children in just twenty-three years. He was the only King of England from the House of Hanover never to commit adultery. This appealing combination of domestic fecundity and stability was of course widely publicised in word and image. At a time when sleaze was making a major contribution to the delegitimation of the French monarchy, the importance of a reputation for marital fidelity should not be underestimated. George was also determined that his example should be followed. Shortly

⁶¹ Sedgwick: Letters from George III (as n. 53), 78.

⁶² Matthew Kilburn: Wallmoden, Amalie Sophie Marianne von, suo jure countess of Yarmouth (1704–1765)', in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28579> <12.02.2014>

⁶³ Kilburn: Wallmoden, Amalie Sophie Marianne von (as n. 62).

⁶⁴ Sedgwick (ed.), Letters from George III (as n. 53), 37.

⁶⁵ Sedgwick (ed.), Letters from George III (as n. 53), 37. George Scott, one of his tutors, wrote of the adolescent George: 'He has no tendency to vice, and has yet very virtuous principles; has the greatest temptation to gallant with the ladies who lay themselves out in the most shameful manner to draw him, but to no purpose. He says if he were not what he is they would not mind him' - Stanley Ayling: George III, London 1972, 36.

⁶⁶ Sedgwick (ed.), Letters from George III (as n. 53), 40.

after his accession, *The King's Proclamation, for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for Preventing and Punishing of Vice, Profaneness, and Immorality* promised that special favour would be paid to those at court who behaved in a Christian manner and called on all public employees to follow this example.⁶⁷

<30>

Also well publicised was the royal couple's simple life-style. Soon after their marriage, George bought Buckingham House in St. James's Park at the west end of The Mall, which soon became generally known as 'The Queen's House'. Although Windsor Castle was later a home for part of the year, St. James's Palace was used only for ceremonial purposes, while Hampton Court and Kensington Palace were abandoned.⁶⁸ It was at The Queen's House that fourteen of their children were born and where they all lived the life of well-to-do but frugal aristocrats in a home that was 'rather neatly elegant than profusely ornamental', as one observer put it in 1767. Twenty years later a distinguished German visitor, Sophie de la Roche, was impressed by 'the noble simplicity of the furnishings, the order and neatness, were marks of the character of the owner – marks of wise humility upon the throne'.⁶⁹ Less benign were the countless caricatures that poured from the presses. Typical was Gillray's *Anti-Saccharites, - or – John Bull and his Family leaving off the use of Sugar* of 1792 which showed the King and the Queen drinking tea without sugar and confronted by six glum daughters. George exclaims 'O delicious! Delicious', while Queen Charlotte exhorts: 'Oh my dear Creatures, do but taste it! You can't think how nice it is without sugar and then consider how much Work you will save the poor Blackamoors by leaving off the use of it! And above all remember how much expence it will save your poor papa! O it is a charming cooling drink.'⁷⁰

<31>

Most important of all, the royal couple set an example of personal piety which both helped to create and harmonised with a powerful religious revival that characterised the second half of the eighteenth century. In the acerbic verdict of David Hume, the English were 'relapsing into the deepest Stupidity, Christianity and ignorance'.⁷¹ George was perfectly placed to benefit from this collective softening of the brain. As his first biographer observed: 'Very few sovereigns have more assiduously thrown the splendour of the throne around the institutions of religion. He was one of the few monarchs of his time who never missed family devotions'.⁷² George was of course the first Hanoverian to be baptised and brought up as an Anglican. The simple but assiduous style of churchmanship he adopted was perfectly in tune with the Church of England's

⁶⁷ John Galt: *George III, his court, and family*, vol. 1, London 1820, 195. It was customary for monarchs to issue such a proclamation at the beginning of a reign - Hannah Smith: *Georgian monarchy. Politics and culture 1714–1760*, Cambridge 2006, 169.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Georgian monarchy* (as n. 67), 242.

⁶⁹ Edna Healey: *The Queen's House. A social history of Buckingham Palace*, London 1997, 47, 52.

⁷⁰ Kenneth Baker: *George III. A life in caricature*, London 2007, 124. This lavishly illustrated volume is an important source for the representation of George III. See also Vincent Carretta: *George III and the satirists from Hogarth to Byron*, Athens, Georgia, London 2007, which contains 161 reproductions.

⁷¹ Quoted in Paul Langford: *A polite and commercial people. England 1727–1783*, Oxford 1989, 133.

⁷² Galt: *George III* (as n. 67), 9.

'evangelical revival'. As Boyd Hilton has written: 'when, back in the 1760s, George III had pontificated about the need for integrity in public life, and had issued a Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, he was widely regarded as an odious prig, but now the moral majority appeared to be catching up with him'.⁷³

<32>

The success of George III's style of representation was advertised repeatedly once the pain of the loss of America had eased, never more eloquently than in the spring of 1789 when he recovered from his first bout of disabling illness. Across the length and breadth of the country, services of thanksgiving were held and addresses of loyalty compiled. The Austrian envoy, Count Reviczy, was deeply impressed, not least because the popular enthusiasm contrasted so starkly with the current opposition to his own master, Joseph II, and the burgeoning revolution in France. How was it possible, he asked, that George was so venerated? His answer was simple:

It is clear... that what has really counted in winning for the King the love of his people have been his good personal qualities, which allow them to live under his rule secure in their liberty and their rights, the judicious choice of ministers which the King has made, the economic way of life he follows, so that he can be as light a burden to the nation as possible, despite his numerous family which needs to be provided for, and finally his morals, principles and piety make him more popular with each day that passes, so that for all time he can count on the most forceful demonstrations of devotion from his subjects⁷⁴.

<33>

Frederick the Great - extravagant, self-indulgent, freethinking, homosexual – and George III – parsimonious, austere, pious, uxorious – had very little in common. They also disliked each other intensely. Both men, however, chose their style of royal representation as a means of coming to terms with the stresses and strains imposed by their troubled childhood and adolescence. It is not inconceivable that an approach based on representation as therapy rather than the pursuit of power by other means might yield a new perspective on other prominent exponents of representational culture, most notably Louis XIV.

Author:

Prof. Tim Blanning FBA

Sidney Sussex College

Cambridge CB2 3HU

England

tcb1000@cam.ac.uk

⁷³ Boyd Hilton: *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846*, Oxford 2006, 178.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Tim Blanning: *George III, Hanover and the Regency Crisis*, in: Jeremy Black (ed.): *Knights errant and true Englishmen. British foreign policy 1660–1800*, Edinburgh 1989, 147.