Karsch was born on 1 December 1722 in Silesia, a historical location in Europe, most of which is now contained within Poland, though small parts remain in Germany. She was a German poet known to her contemporaries as ‘the German Sappho’. She was born the daughter of an innkeeper and, due to her social position, did not receive any form of formal education. She led a humble life scarred by poverty and two unfortunate marriages, in both of which she was a victim of severe abuse. Her literary career began with the memorization of hymns, poems and short pieces of prose, which led to her own creation of poems that were used to celebrate weddings and funerals of her fellow peasants.

Karsch discovered that she had a natural gift, which was quickly noticed by her friends and peers. Her friend Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim\(^1\) gave her the title “the German Sappho”. Frederick II eventually agreed to give her a pension and build her a house, which was only realized after his death by his successor Friedrich Wilhelm II in 1787. She lived there until her death on 12 October 1791 in Berlin. Her poetry was widely appreciated and was her path into the leading literary circles of Berlin. In a world of learned poets and critics, she remained a woman of humble existence, paying tribute to her humble upbringing and education in sewing and cooking. When her children were young she supported their upbringing by selling her poetry.

The following selections of poetry greatly represent the Karsch in her humble upbringing; this can be seen in both the topics that she discusses and the language that she uses. Karsch uses her poetry to tell the story of her life and the lives of women like her. Her poetry seems in many ways to be an unpublished and uncollected journal of her life, and we can follow her in her thoughts and feelings as she wrote each individual piece. In one of the following pieces, Kenner von dem saphischen Gesange!, we are able to understand the emotions and experiences of a woman, such as Karsch, who is in an abusive marriage, and how trapped she really felt. For her there was no way out.

\(^1\) A German poet who saw the success of his poetry put to music. Much of his work is preserved today in Halberstadt, comprising one of the oldest literary museums in Germany in existence today.
It is a deeply emotional piece that represents a little bit of us as we find ourselves in situations, from which we believe we cannot escape. It is important to consider how each of these pieces may reflect a chapter of our own lives, and understand what we can learn from this great poet.

**Sources for Further Study**


Kenner von dem saphischen Gesange!¹

ANNA LOUISA KARsch

An den Dohmherrn² von Rochow,
alser gesagt hatte,
die Liebe müsse sie gelehret haben, so schöne Verse zu machen.

KENNER VON DEM SAPHISCHEN³ ESANGE!
Unter deinem weissen Ueberhange
Klopft ein Herze, voller Gluth⁴ in dir!
Von der Liebe ward es unterrichtet
Dieses Herze, aber ganz erdichtet
Nennst du sie die Lehrerin von mir!

Meine Jugend ward⁵ gedrückt von Sorgen,
Seufzend sang an manchem Sommernorgen
Meine Einfalt ihr gestammelt⁶ Lied;
Nicht dem Jüngling thöneten Gesänge,
Nein, dem Gott, der auf der Menschen Menge,
Wie auf Ameishaufen⁷ niedersieht!

² *der Domherr*: capitular, canon [rel.]
³ *sappisch*: Sapphic. It pertains to the Sapphic metre of poetry, often containing love lyrics
⁴ *die Glut*: blaze, ember, fervency
⁵ *ward*: wurde
⁶ *stammeln*: to babble, to stammer
⁷ *Ameishaufen*: Ant-hill. God looks down on the people on earth and sees them as busy anthills.
Ohne Regung, die ich oft beschreibe,
Ohne Zärtlichkeit ward ich zum Weibe,
Ward zur Mutter! wie im wilden Krieg,
Unverliebt ein Mädchen werden müßte,
Die ein Krieger halb gezwungen küßte,
    Der die Mauer einer Stadt erstieg.

Sing ich Lieder für der Liebe Kenner:
Dann denk ich den zärtlichsten\(^8\) der Männer,
    Den ich immer wünschte, nie erhielt;
Keine Gattin\(^9\) küßte je getreuer,
    Als ich in der Sapho sanftem Feuer
    Lippen küßte, die ich nie gefühlt!

Was wir heftig lange wünschen müssen,
    Und was wir nicht zu erhalten wissen,
Drückt sich tiefer unserm Herzen ein;
Rebensaft\(^10\) verschwendet der Gesunde,
    Und erquickend schmeckt des Kranken Munde
    Auch im Traum der ungetrunke Wein.

\(^{8}\) zärtlich: endearing, tender, affectionate  
\(^{9}\) die Gattin: spouse, wife (male form: der Gatte)  
\(^{10}\) der Rebensaft: juice of the grape