A History of the Château de la Muette



Michael W. Oborne

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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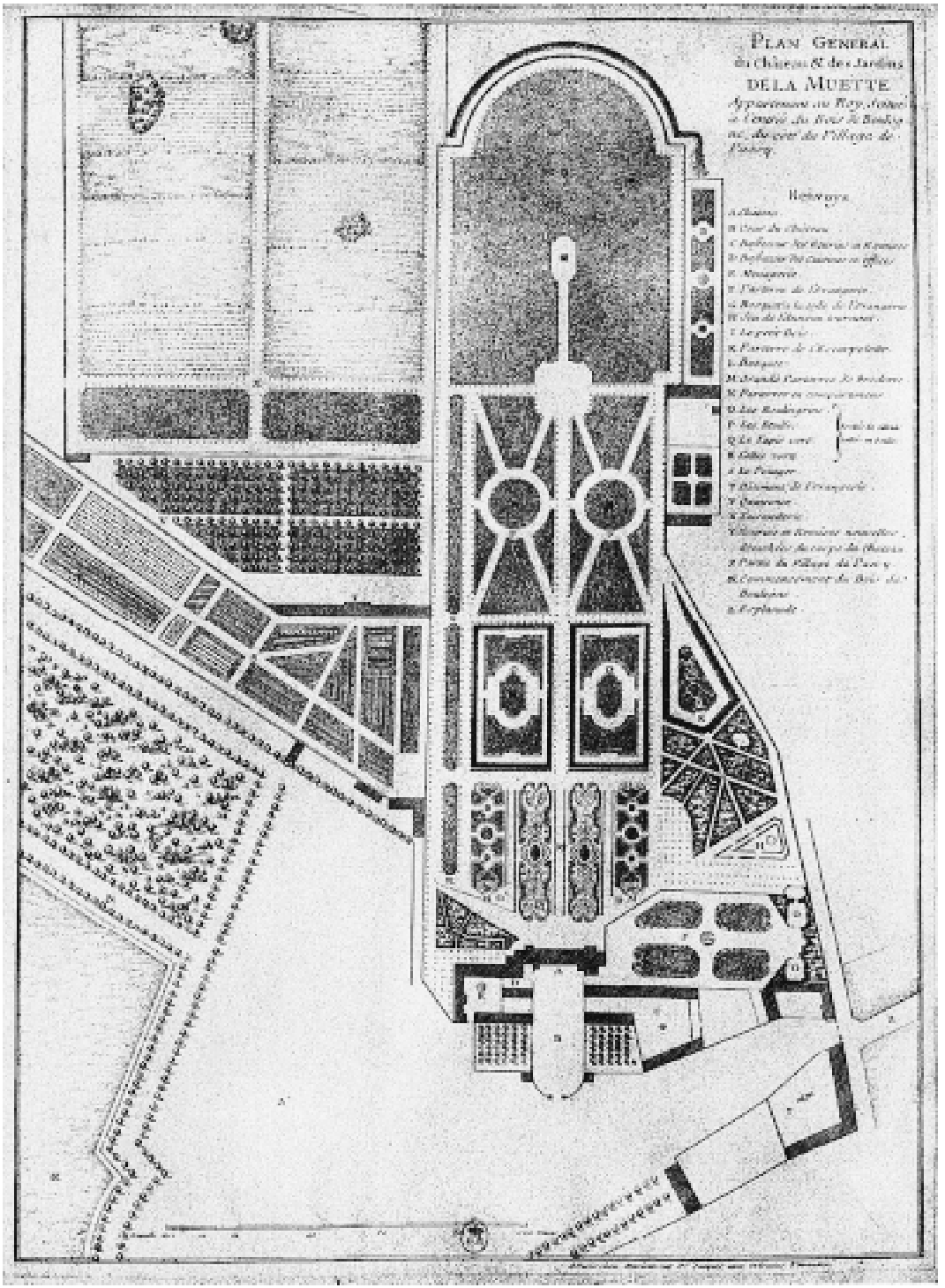
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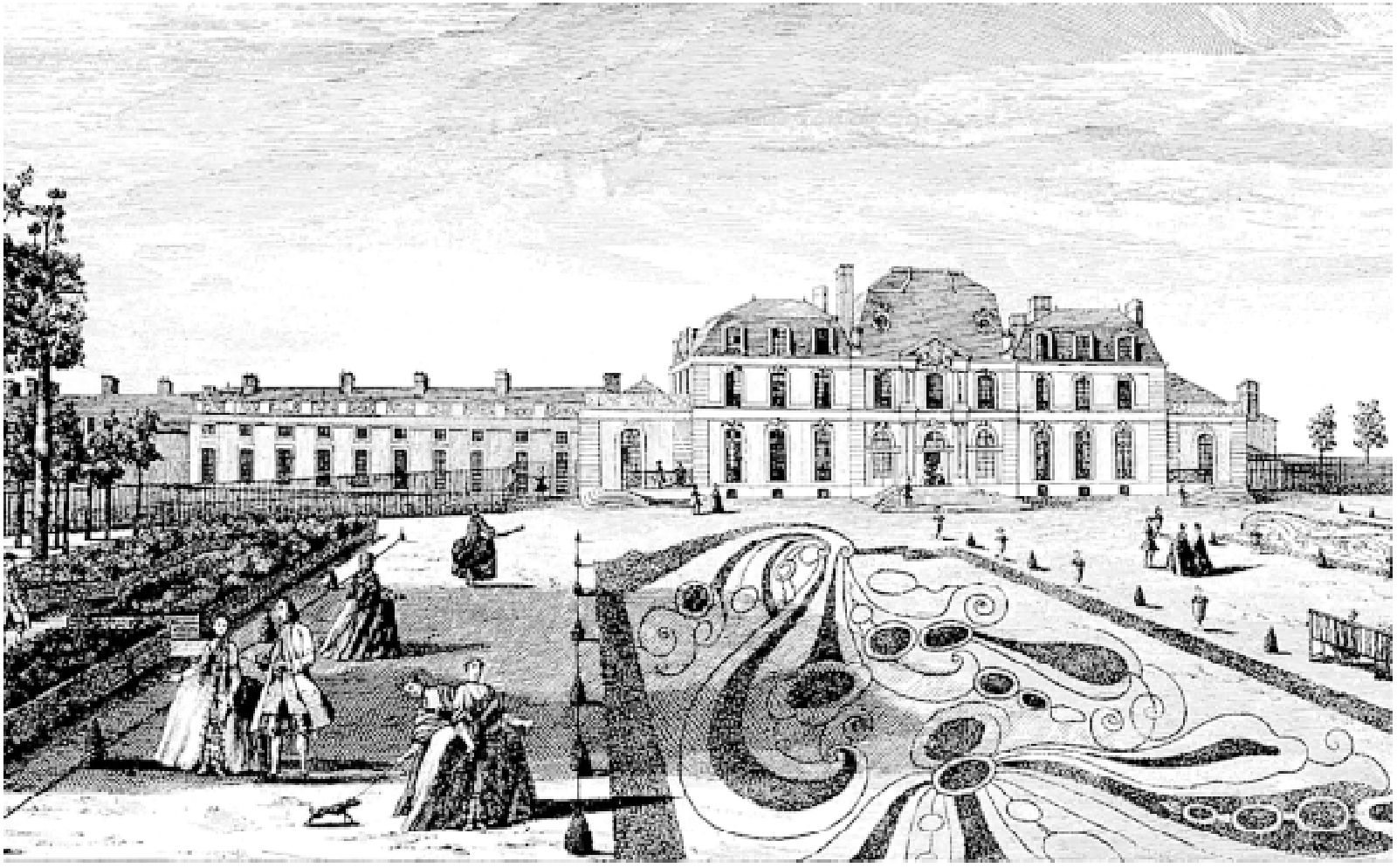
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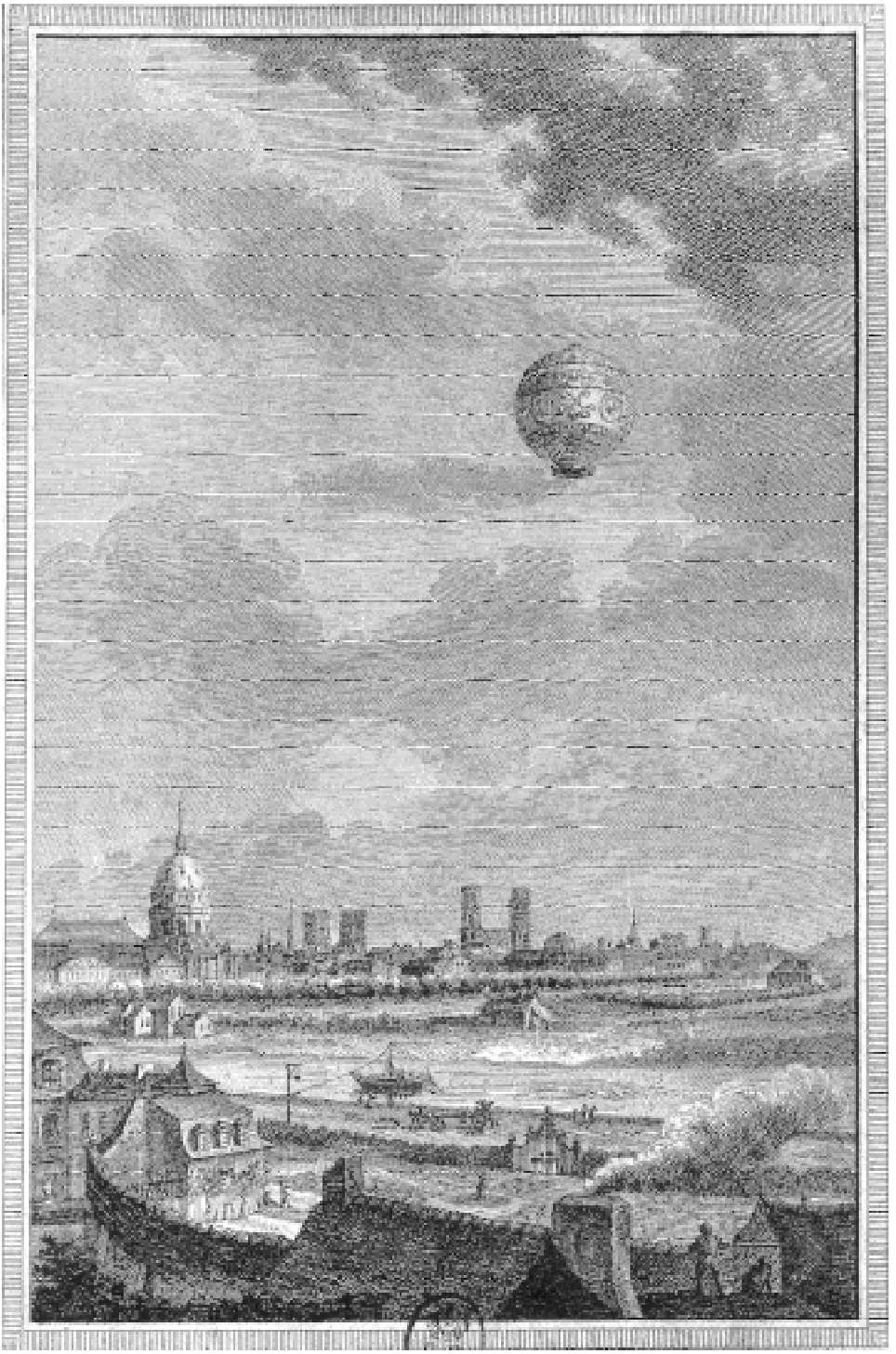
Plan of the Château de la Muette and its gardens, circa 1780.



The Château de la Muette in the mid-18th century.



The Château de la Muette in 1900.



Taking off from La Muette, Pilâtre de Rosier makes the first manned balloon flight on 21 November 1783.

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Arrivée du roi Louis XV au Château de la Muette
Huile sur toile par Charles I. Gravenbroeck, 1738
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Preface

La Muette, home of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has a long and rich history. Its present-day use is a fitting continuation of that chequered story, and the reader may find it amusing, and sometimes instructive, to meet some of the colourful characters who once roamed its galleries. The place itself has played a significant role in French history; the Château and its extensive park were once the theatre of many a strong sentiment and the locale is impregnated with memories, comic, tragic, venal, lofty, solemn and ludic. These traces of the past are the real substance of La Muette's charm; they are also the voices that echo through this text and linger in the halls of the Château.

Chronology of La Muette

717 *Rouvroy Forest (the present Bois de Boulogne) is mentioned for the first time in the Charter of Compiègne.*

1358 *Rouvroy Forest is referred to as "Forest of Saint-Cloud" in the* Chroniques de Saint-Denis*; the Abbess of Montmartre is made "liege lord" of the forest.*

1416-17 *Troops of the Duke of Burgundy burn down part of Rouvroy Forest; the forest takes the name "Bois de Boulogne".*

1480 *The royal barber/minister Olivier le Daim is named Captain of Pont de Saint-Cloud, "Guardian of the Forest of Rouvroy-Saint-Cloud".*

1484 *Coictier, the royal surgeon, inherits the domain Rouvroy-Saint-Cloud-Bois de Boulogne.*

1526 *Jerome della Robbia completes the Château de Madrid (or Château de Boulogne) in the Bois de Boulogne for Francis I. He also builds a wall around the Bois.*

1542-49 *Francis I builds a small lodge at the edge of the Bois for royal hunting parties; it takes the name "La Meute".*

1556 *Henry II rebuilds the wall around the Bois with twelve gates opening onto the paths crossing the forest.*

1572 *Charles IX enlarges the La Meute lodge to a small château on the site with the same name. He cedes La Meute to his sister, Marguerite de Valois, on the occasion of her marriage to Henry of Navarre (Henry IV).*

1606 *Marguerite, now divorced from Henry IV, offers La Muette to the Dauphin (son of Henry and Marie de Médicis), the future Louis XIII; La Muette becomes a "royal domain". Current spelling is adopted.*

1624 *Louis XIII has a hunting lodge built at Versailles; royal domains to the west of Paris include the Châteaux of Saint-Cloud, Meudon and Versailles.*

1651 *The first horse race is organised in the Bois de Boulogne.*

1679 *A royal edict establishes a conservation policy for the forest which remains in effect until the Revolution; the Captain of the Forest is charged with enforcing the policy. (A captaincy is a purchased office giving hunting and occasionally forest exploitation rights to the incumbent.)*

1685 *La Muette is inhabited by Thomas Catelan de la Sablonnière, Captain of the Bois de Boulogne.*

1702 *Fleuriau d'Armenonville replaces Catelan as Captain of the Forest and becomes owner of La Muette. He improves the gardens by adding a formal, elongated parterre at the back of the château.*

1716 *The Regent, Philip d'Orléans, acquires La Muette for his daughter, Marie-Louise-Élizabeth, Duchess of Berry, in exchange for the Château of*

Madrid, also located in the Boulogne Forest. Philip d'Orléans has the small hunting château reconstructed into a larger château.

1717 *The Duchess of Berry, daughter of the Regent, lives at La Muette, and receives Peter the Great at the château. The numerous parties and soirées at La Muette bring it a reputation of gallantry, intrigue and amusement.*

1719 *The Chevalier de Rion, the secret lover of the Duchess of Berry, is named Governor of the Household at La Muette. Madame de Berry dies at La Muette. The Regent Philip purchases the domain for the young king, Louis XV.*

1741-45 *Louis XV hires the architects Gabriel, father and son, who completely rebuild La Muette (the second château at La Muette). A main building – the château itself – is flanked by two large independent pavilions, the size of small châteaux, and a series of outbuildings. Madame de Pompadour lives at La Muette for six years, organising the new décor of the château; figuring among the additions are hunting scenes commissioned from the painter Oudry.*

1749 *The king holds sessions of the Council of State in the château.*

1750 *The Curiosities Cabinet, both a scientific laboratory and a museum, is built in the gardens at La Muette; the learned Benedictine Père Noël is the chief scientist and demonstrator for the large aristocratic crowds that come to visit the establishment.*

1753 *Louis XV, who now lives at La Muette on a regular basis, decides to have a long alley cut*

through the Bois de Boulogne to the River Seine near Saint-Cloud so that he can see Madame de Pompadour's château at Bellevue. The king plans to build a new château at La Muette to face Bellevue. The expenses of the Seven Years' War prevent this extravagant plan.

1764 *New modifications are made to La Muette, including a remodelling of the gardens. The Dauphin Louis XVI takes up residence at La Muette.*

1770 *Marie-Antoinette arrives at La Muette to await her marriage to Louis XVI at Versailles. She lives off and on at La Muette over the next three years.*

1774 *Louis XVI inherits La Muette as a royal domain. On this occasion, the Edict of La Muette is issued from the château (the renunciation of the "Don de joyeux avènement").*

1783 *21 November: Taking off from the gardens of La Muette, Pilâtre de Rozier, accompanied by the Marquis d'Arlandes, makes the first "Montgolfier" balloon ascent over Paris.*

1787 *La Muette, no longer used by the king and in serious need of repair, is put up for public sale to raise money for the king's expenses at Versailles.*

1788 *The Châteaux of La Muette and Madrid are put up for sale by the royal Edict of February, 1788. The buyers are expressly permitted to tear down either set of buildings to sell off the materials. There are no buyers for either, probably due to the high selling price.*

1790 *At the height of the Revolution, the city of Paris offers a great civic banquet for 15 000 federal*

soldiers in the now-abandoned gardens of La Muette (the present-day site of the Ranelagh gardens). The Curiosities Cabinet is dismantled and all scientific instruments moved to the Observatory. The 18th century building which housed the laboratory is sold off with other outbuildings of the châteaux and incorporated into the urban fabric at what is now the corner of Rue de Passy and Rue de la Pompe.

1791 *The vast domain – gardens, châteaux and numerous outbuildings – is broken up and sold off piecemeal. The city of Paris decides to install a regular army patrol in the old château to protect the former royal domain of the Bois de Boulogne from poaching, tree-cutting and other serious damage caused by the Revolutionary troubles.*

1793 *The main château and some of the outbuildings and gardens are sold off. Two separate buildings are carved out of the original 18th century château. All precious materials – marbles, floors, mirrors, fireplaces and any permanently installed paintings – are removed and sold. The two wings of the old château are separated and transformed into outdoor restaurants. Later, continuous cotton spinning machines are installed in the servants' outbuildings by the English inventor-engineer Milne. The majority of the park remains property of the state. André Chénier, the poet, is arrested near La Muette and together with the amateur painter Mme Filleul, former Concierge of La Muette, is judged, found guilty, and guillotined several days before the end of the Terror.*

1796 *For a short time, the Marquis de Talleyrand rents one wing of the old château (the so-called*

Petite Muette) to live there. Mmes Tallien and Récamier come often to La Muette for long stays.

1811 *The street "Chaussée de La Muette" is paved and opened as a public thoroughfare. It no longer serves as entry to the château.*

1816 *Under the Restoration, La Muette returns to the Crown. Due to the cost of repairs to the remaining buildings (the outbuildings and two large pavilions), a decision is made to abandon La Muette once again and remove it from the Civil List.*

1818 *The State Minister Corvetto lives off and on at La Petite Muette.*

1820 *Sebastian Érard, the famous piano-maker who had given lessons to Marie-Antoinette in the salons of La Muette before the Revolution, purchases one of the two separate wings of La Muette, as well as much of the remaining garden, and begins to restore them. He adds a long gallery and two storeys. A large painting collection is housed at La Muette in a gallery built in the garden.*

1831 *Pierre Érard, Sebastian's nephew, inherits La Muette. He sells off the painting collection and rents La Muette to Dr. Guérin, who turns the pavilion into an orthopaedic hospital.*

1838 *Pierre Érard marries and moves back into La Muette.*

1841 *Fortifications are built around the city of Paris, separating the property of La Muette from the Bois de Boulogne.*

1853 *Pierre Érard buys back part of the gardens and the old château wing called La Petite Muette.*

1854 *The Auteuil-Passy railroad cuts through the property, separating much of the garden from the remaining buildings.*

1860 *The poet Lamartine is forced to sell his country house at Milly near Fontainebleau, and takes up residence in a villa built on part of the property of the old Château de la Muette, on the Boulevard Henri-Martin today.*

1865 *Mme Pierre Érard begins remodelling the property of La Muette and La Petite Muette. The separate gardens are gradually consolidated into a single property.*

1865-70 *Many of the most important musicians of the day come to La Muette for private concerts and parties, including Gounod, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Berlioz, David, Reyer, Massenet, Léo Delibes, Guiraud, Ambroise Thomas, and the composer Richard Wagner, who dedicates the score of Tannhauser to Mme Érard. Among the famous pianists who perform at La Muette are Liszt, Thalberg and Rubinstein; among the great singers who give recitals are Roger, Faure, Mmes Krauss, Miolan-Caralho and Fidès-Devriès.*

1870 *During the Siege of Paris, La Muette is used by the Vice-Admiral Fleuriot de Lange as a general headquarters.*

1871 *During the Commune, La Muette is used as military headquarters for Generals Clinchant, Douay and Ladmiraut; Communards are massacred in the gardens of the château after the*

events of May. Érard's nephew inherits the château; on his death, his wife wills the property to her niece, Mme de Franqueville, wife of the Count de Franqueville.

1889 *Mme de Franqueville restores the property according to the plans of the architect Gabriel. The two parts of the old château (La Muette and La Petite Muette) become one building, joined by a new central section. The two storeys added to La Muette are eliminated; the building is reconstructed to look like an 18th century château.*

1900 *The property passes to Mme de Franqueville's husband, the Count de Franqueville, and his six children.*

1906 *The Episcopal Conference of France meets in La Muette to discuss the anticlerical laws being enacted by the Republic.*

1912-19 *Large portions of the remaining garden are sold to developers to build middle-class apartment buildings as a means of securing rent for the Franqueville family. The Rothschild family acquires two plots of land for the construction of a modern château.*

1919 *The Count de Franqueville dies; the 18th-19th century reconstructed pastiche château of La Muette, situated between the Rue du Conseiller-Collignon (at number 17) and Boulevard Émile Augier, is torn down. Last remnants disappear in 1926.*

1921 *Henri de Rothschild orders construction of a new Château de la Muette (the third château).*

1922 *Rothschild finishes the present château. A series of brilliant literary and artistic dinners and receptions lend renown to La Muette once again between the two World Wars. Rothschild writes numerous plays and novels under the pen-name of André Pascal.*

1939 *Rothschild moves to his home near Lausanne, Switzerland where he lives throughout the war.*

1940 *La Muette becomes the military headquarters of the German Naval Command.*

1945 *Paris is liberated, and La Muette becomes one of the military headquarters of the Allied Powers (United States Naval Command).*

1948 *The Rothschild heirs sell the property on the north and south sides of the Rue André-Pascal to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation.*

1988 *Mme Deutsch de la Meurthe, who owns a mansion and two plots opposite it on the Rue de Franqueville, dies; the property is sold to a construction firm. The last open space of the old Muette outside the OECD property is sold off for development.*

Table of Contents

Chronology of La Muette 5

What's in a Name? 17

Chapter I
The Surrounding Forest 23

Chapter II
The Château de la Muette 41

Chapter III
The Second Château – La Muette Under Louis XV 61

Chapter IV
La Muette – The Twilight 81

Chapter V
The Revolution 91

Chapter VI
The 19th Century 97

Chapter VII
The New Beginning 115

Notes 125

Bibliography 131

What's in a Name?



HE name "La Muette" persists in the 16th *arrondissement* of Paris, attached to what is called today the Château de la Muette. It also designates a metro station at one end of a street called the Chaussée de la Muette, and the location of what was once a gate along former walled ramparts now turned into outer boulevards (Porte de la Muette). That name is all that remains of a bygone domain. For three centuries it played an important part in the life of French sovereigns, and provided a theatre for a number of dramas played out in the *ancien régime*. The name itself, like a mysterious cipher, hides a many-dimensioned past. To explore that name is a fitting introduction to the place itself. In a very real way, the past haunts the present – neither in the guise of ethereal phantoms nor as ghosts returned from beyond the pale, but in language itself, in conjuring up the names of that sometime Eden we call the Past.

This particular name is part of the game of hide-and-seek; it points silently to past functions and past fantasies linked to the place. Confusingly, the spelling has changed over time, clouding the origins of the term and the first meaning. Was the first spelling really "La Meute", as appears in many 17th century references? If so, what of this alternate spelling found in the late 16th century, "La Muete"? Are the changes meaningful, or only the well-known problem for the historian who must deal with alternate but non-significant spellings during a given period?

A short exploration of the two spellings and multiple meanings will perhaps reveal some of those hidden functions linked so closely to the place itself, for these could be unconscious renderings of the way in which La Muette has been perceived and used by a carefree aristocracy over time. The inventory that follows is drawn from various historical sources ranging over the past three hundred years.

Four trails: "la mue", "le muet/la muette", "la muette" and "la meute"

The *Dictionnaire des Trévoux* (1740-56), the learned undertaking of the Jesuits in the early part of the 18th century, gives an eclectic review of the term "la mue" (from the Latin verb *mutare*, "to change").

I. La mue

Referring to transformation

1. A shedding or moulting by an animal of skin, feathers, hair or horns, either on an annual basis or at certain transitional moments passing from one age of life to another; the wonderful voices of men are said to be lost at puberty, after their "moulting".
2. For horses, a shedding of hair which takes place during the spring and sometimes in the autumn. For deer, the term refers to the shedding of antlers in February or March; for serpents, the annual shedding of the skin.
3. Du Cange derives the word from the low Latin term *Muta* (*mutatione pennarum*); according to Vossius the word is traced to the Germanic term *muyte* and not to the Latin *mutare*.
4. Falcons are placed in small houses (mues) during their period of moulting, as they can become aggressive.

5. "Mue" is also a way of expressing the age of a bird, and in particular the falcon: a falcon of three moultings, is a falcon of three years (*vernatio vernationis tempestas*).

Referring to a place, or a space

1. A "mue" is also an obscure and narrow place where birds are kept during the period they shed their feathers. Certain birds are kept in these places to induce this transformation because at the same time they are fattened for eating.
2. One can say figuratively or in jest that a mue is a place of voluntary or forced retirement or seclusion; thus, a man in prison is a man in a "mue".

II. Le muet/la muette

The other semantic origin is the term "le muet/la muette" (someone/something silent, taciturn), which also suggests a number of hidden meanings.

Of persons or animals

1. a person who cannot or will not speak or act;
2. in moral philosophy, a person who cannot speak because his/her mind is confused by passion;
3. a person who never writes;
4. a person who is secretive;
5. a dog which hunts without barking or making noise;
6. antithetically, a noisy woman;
7. Muta, the name of a goddess of the ancient Romans, whose feast is the twelve days preceding the Kalends of March (18 February); associated with the winter hunt.

Of things

1. Figuratively, of inanimate things which express a hidden meaning, or signify something not seen.

2. In grammar, when a letter is not pronounced but is still used in the spelling of a word.

III. La muette

The centre of linguistic gravity around this word relates to metamorphoses and the hunt. The *Dictionnaire* continues:

> "*La Muette:* a hunting term. 'Une muette' is a small house built in a Captaincy of the Hunt both for purposes of adjudicating contentious issues related to the hunt (*i.e.* poaching) or to lodge the Captain of the Hunt, other officers or even a place to keep the dogs (*domus saltuaria, domus venatia*); thus the small hunting lodges of the Boulogne and Saint-Germain forests are so-called, because the Sargent and guards of the royal hunt bring the antlers (les mues) of deer that they find in the forest and pile them up in the lodge as a means of counting the deer population."

IV. La meute

The alternate spelling from the 17th century comes from the Latin verb *movere*, "to move", "to conduct an expedition of war":

1. A collective term meaning a pack of hunting dogs trained to hunt rabbit and deer.
2. The term is occasionally applied generically to deer or other prey.
3. The word *émeute* means a rowdy pack of dogs, hence a riot.

The traditional rendering of the term "La Muette" has linked the word to a small hunting lodge located at the

border of the Boulogne Forest. The multiple sources of meaning provide signals and signs of the many functions to be associated with this royal playground.

But a deeper, more troubling linguistic influence also is present in the above definitions: that of the secretive, the reclusive and the hidden from sight. It is this second meaning that perhaps masks the true function of La Muette after 1700: a secure trysting place for royalty and nobles, far from the moralising voices of the Court, or the guffaws of a plebeian crowd all too ready to spy on and judge the licentious behaviour of the upper classes. If La Muette was to be anything, it would be discreet.

2

Chapter I

The Surrounding Forest

The long history of the Château de la Muette is intimately tied to that of its protecting forest.

The Bois de (Woods of) Boulogne was once part of a great oak forest to the southwest of the small Roman town of Lutecia, present-day Paris. The Seine, called by the Romans *Sequana* or *Sigona*, cut through the forest as it looped around the present Seine Valley; the oaks covered a huge area bounded by the village of Saint-Cloud to the west, by the future locale of Versailles to the south and Saint-Ouen to the north, and to the east by the Seine river in what is now the 16th *arrondissement* of Paris. At the time of Julius Caesar (53 BC), this forest had a generic name; it was simply called the oak forest, *roburetum*. Through a series of linguistic turns and evolutions, it became known as *rovertum*, and later, the more commonly used name in Normandy, "Rouvroy Forest".

The vast collection of stocky oak was legendary for its dark secrets as well as its varied and numerous types of game. The emperor Julian, called the Apostate, is said to have roamed this forest on many a hunt in those halcyon days of Rome's declining empire. He created a port for small ships near the present town of Saint-Cloud; the forest had few trails at that time, and was unprotected from exploitation for game and firewood. Gradually, the forest came to be inhabited by rustics and hermits who used this great cloak of nature to eke

out their lives in solitude and humble occupations. Small hamlets, like the Nijon, grew up in areas now occupied by Trocadéro; later, larger villages came into existence at Auteuil and Chaillot. These modest developments all took place during the turbulent centuries from 700 to 900 AD, when Norman raids pushed back the vestigal powers left in Paris. The forest was ravaged many times by the crude warriors from Normandy who sought wood and materials for their long boats and massive constructions in a new-found homeland of the Norman plains.

In those dark decades, indeed centuries, the forest had no real owner in any sense. Rouvroy Forest was first mentioned in the Charter of Compiègne in 717; Chilpéric II, the roving king of the Franks, gave the forest "situated on the banks of the Seine… with its rights and its enclosure" to the Abbot of Saint-Denis – the royal Benedictine abbey north of Paris. This gift, one of many over the centuries to the royal abbey, was to link Saint-Denis to the western region of Paris until the end of the 18th century. The twin Benedictine abbey of nuns at Montmartre also owned many of the small villages along the west bank of the Seine near Saint-Cloud, as well as the small town of Boulogne, reinforcing the monastic presence in the area.

It was not until the 14th century that the forest took on the name of "Bois de Boulogne". This came about, like most changes in place-names, through a re-founding of the site: in 1319, zealous pilgrims, returning from the seaside town of Boulogne-sur-Mer in northern France, obtained permission from King Philip the Long permission to build a church along the lines of the pilgrim church in Boulogne. The small township of Menus, which belonged to the Montmartre Benedictines, changed its name to Boulogne-sur-Seine, and the nearby forest gradually became known as the Forest of Boulogne. Those two

place-names have remained through the last seven hundred years.

The forest spread over most of south and west Paris, punctuated by clearings for small towns and occasionally a larger building such as the rudimentary palace of Saint-Germain, where successive generations of French kings lived during several months of the year. The very size of the forest invited trouble, especially for travellers or careless villagers who wandered too far into the woods. The legends of Robin Hood, among others, have popularised the use of forests as retreats for the highwaymen of those times; they were probably much more dangerous than that. Most important travellers moved in groups, or were accompanied by armed guards. Less important folk clustered together to move about in small armed bands.

One of the place-names in the forest that has come down to us today is the Catalan Field (Pré Catalan) in the middle of the woods. Today a famous restaurant stands by a solitary cross. Several explanations have been offered for the name, and the cross.

The first possible explanation is a story that demonstrates both how precarious travel was, and how enduring place-names can be. Although the following story was repeated often over the centuries, its authenticity was questioned in the late 19th century. Its charm and flavour suggest that it belongs in our catalogue of events that surround the magical forest. In the 13th and 14th centuries, troubadours travelled the country, moving about from monastery to château, town to city, selling their talents as singers and raconteurs of half-mythic tales; they also were the carriers of news and information from far-off places, including news of the wars then raging in the Middle East. The more famous ones became the sought-after

guests of the feudal nobility of the time. Among them was Arnould le Catalan, better known as Tremelotta. His reputation was largely based upon his florid poetry, written and sung in the southern dialect of Provençal-Catalan. He was a permanent guest in the Court of Raymond Béranger, the powerful Count of Provence. There, Catalan charmed the count's wife, Beatrice of Savoy, with his songs, and made her the most famous woman in France.

This aroused envy in the comparatively humble royal Court. The King of France lived far from the brilliant cultural centres of the south of the country, in a small fortified residence near the present area of Passy (perhaps near the Rue de la Tour, which bears the name of a medieval castle long disappeared). Philip IV, known as Philip the Handsome, was more than politically ambitious; he also had pretentions to literary fame. Having heard of Catalan, he made a formal request to Beatrice to lend him Catalan for a season – for troubadours were not unlike modern rock stars under contract to designated patrons. Catalan's engagement was finally arranged, to the great delight of Philip.

Catalan travelled north to Paris, and when Philip heard of his approach via the southern part of the Rouvroy Forest, he sent his captain of the guard with an escort to make sure nothing happened to the famous *meistersinger* on his last leg of the journey. The armed men soon found the poet and his sole companion moving slowly through the dark forest. The southerners had a mule loaded down with bundles and minstrel equipment. As the guard joined them and guided them through the forest, the chatty southerner began to brag of the splendours of the Midi; he indicated that the bundles contained precious gifts from the Countess to Philip, gifts that could not be imagined this far north in such a rude climate. The

captain saw the opportunity of a lifetime: he silently ordered the attack on the two men, who were cut to pieces by their supposed protectors. The latter fell on the bundles and stripped them from the mule. Their disappointment was matched only by their surprise: the bundles contained vials of perfume and rich liqueurs, the specialities of Provence.

Confounded, the men returned to Philip to say that Catalan had not been found, and that he probably was on his way to Passy via another route. After several days, Philip began to worry. He organised a search party to go into the forest. The victims were soon found near a clearing in the forest, stripped of their possessions. When this was reported to the king, Philip was deeply distraught. He ordered the forest to be cleared of the rabble who inhabited it – a Herculean task that nobody took seriously. As a memorial to the dead poet, the king was said to have had a stone monument erected in the form of a pyramid, topped with a cross bearing on one side the arms of Provence, and on the other those of Monaco, Catalan's native city. Nostalgics say that the cross visible today is in fact what remains of the column.

Philip ordered an investigation into the tragedy. Beatrice sent word that the troubadour carried with him perfumes from Provence, famous then as today for the liquid scent of flowers and herbs. The captain of the guard who had carried out the assassination was not privy to this message between sovereigns; some months later, he appeared at the royal residence of Passy drenched in perfume. This news came to Philip, perhaps through the complaints of a jealous courtier. The king suspected foul play; he arrested the captain as well as the other men of the guard. The means of justice were swift and sure: the men were handed over to the chief officers of justice, and were tortured according to the practices of the time. After avowing

their guilt, they were sentenced to be burned alive at the stake "by means of a slow fire" on the Place de Grève in Paris.

A second, similar story provides another explanation of the place-name Catalan. The tale recounts the adventures of another Catalan, the troubadour William de Catalan. In the year 1294, the Queen of France, Jeanne de Navarre, was told by a soothsayer she had brought to her Court that, should she go into Rouvroy Forest on the night of Christmas, at midnight sharp, holding in one hand her own portrait and in the other some winter flowers, she would attain the mysterious "state of a pure heart" foretold by the weird sister. The queen, being no fool, apparently persuaded the Court troubadour, William de Catalan, to undertake the adventure. In lieu of her portrait, she gave him a gold coin with her likeness stamped on it. Catalan, ever the romantic, headed for the forest at the appointed time, and in the dark of night, picked the winter flowers, and opened his hand to reveal the likeness of his royal mistress; he found himself surrounded with the night people of the forest. In a twinkling, they saw an opportunity to enrich themselves, and murdered the poor poet on the spot. But the gold piece was but a simulacrum of gold, and the truants betrayed themselves in a tavern brag, entraining their arrest and death. The queen was said to have erected the cross in the forest for Catalan, with the arms of Provence engraved upon it.

A third, more plausible – if more prosaic – explanation of the name Pré Catelan comes from the 17th century. As was common during that century of bounders and opportunists, a young member of the nouveau riche by the name of François Catelan began buying up land in order to establish his claim to landed-gentry status. He took the title of Lord of Sablonnière after having acquired substantial lands in the Bois de Boulogne.

His son, Théophile Catelan, not only inherited the title of Lord of Sablonnière, but himself bought the titles of Captain of the Boulogne Forest, as well as Governor of the Château de Madrid and the Château de la Muette.

It is possible, therefore, that the remains of the column in the forest are in fact the vestiges of the tomb of Théophile, who was buried in the middle of his domain.

Finally, the name could refer to a cross marking the "crossroads" of two paths that led though the forest, a practice that is common in the great forests of France even today. It was the habit to give the name of the crossroads to a property or house nearby, something that would explain the present name of Catelan.[1]

During the reign of Louis XI, the forest was once again the object of a public works project. Two large roads were constructed. The first went from Passy through part of the forest to Boulogne-sur-Seine; the second went from Passy through the woods to Neuilly. It is at the end of this period that the royal houses and mansions that border the forest enter the picture. The forest was gradually reduced in size, due to the construction of the Château de Boulogne – afterward called the Château de Madrid – near the present border of Neuilly; and the creation of properties at La Muette. Later, other princely manors encroached upon the forest: the châteaux and houses at Passy, le Coq, Bagatelle, Boufflers and Chaillot.

Francis I, imbued with the dominant Italian culture then spreading across Europe, called upon Jerome della Robbia to come to France to build for him a royal residence in the forest. It took the name Château de Madrid. His successors, Henry II and Charles IX, both used the château as a royal residence, and a place

to lodge artists and savants of the time. Francis I also enclosed Rouvroy Forest with a crude wall.

The forest narrowly escaped destruction or severe mutilation during the reign of Henry II, when this monarch decided to build a grandiose cemetery in the woods, not unlike the Roman Appian Way. Henry's idea was to cut the forest with six alleys that would radiate from a central clearing; in that hub space, in the heart of the forest, he planned to construct a magnificent tomb for himself, where his heart and entrails would be buried (his body being destined for Saint-Denis, as was the tradition). Along the alleys would be buried the various members of the newly founded knighthood, the Order of the Holy Spirit, all of whom would be called upon to invest in the Elysian real estate project. For a variety of reasons the project was never implemented, and the woods remained the wild hunting grounds for king and nobility throughout the 16th and 17th centuries.

Henry II did rebuild the surrounding wall, in order to preserve the forest for the royal hunt. Twelve gates opened the wall at regular intervals, and the forest continued to be used for thoroughfare traffic. That flow was interrupted throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries, when the forest gates were closed on an arbitrary basis. Whenever Louis XV came to La Muette for the hunt, he ordered the gates shut for the duration of his stay. It was not until the reign of Louis XVI that the gates were left open on a permanent basis.

Duels and daredevils

Given its proximity to the city and the Court, the forest was a natural choice for arbitrating disputes among men – and even women – of a certain class. Duelling as a means of settling arguments had been

banned in France since the 13th century. It remained, however, a favoured method for regulating affairs among the nobility, attached as they were to the codes of honour dictated by their notions of class. Swords were used until the late 16th century; thereafter, pistols were the fashion. These affairs could be very bloody, and at the same time indecisive. The importance of a duel lay in its formality: the ritual surrounding it, the exchanged shots, the reconciliation afterwards – if things went well. The popularity of duelling in the forest persisted until the mid-19th century. Many a young man was carried away dying or dead by his grieving friends. Romantics found the duel an excellent scenario in their theatrical world of overreaction, and the dark glades of the Bois de Boulogne provided a rich *décor* for this high drama played out by dawn's early light.

Honour and public esteem were social values in the *ancien régime* that formed the basis of aristocratic and upper middle class codes. Of the many stories that have come down to us concerning duels in the Bois, the following are among the most interesting.

In 1762, two Swiss guards, close friends in the service of the king, were overheard in dispute at the Opéra. In fact, it appears that each had insulted the other in the dark without knowing to whom he was speaking. The military system of honour came into play and the two were forced to duel in the woods, after a ceremonial meal with the regiment. Fortunately, one of the participants was only wounded in the fray, satisfying the ancient code of honour. The two remained friends for life; the victor spent the next ten months nursing back to life the man he had wounded, never leaving his bedside. Another life-drama taken from the pages of romance!

One of the most famous duels of the 18th century centred on the dispute between the Count of Artois

(the brother of Louis XVI; later Charles X) and the Duke of Bourbon, the last of the famous Condé family and a close relative of the royal family. Once again the affair started at the Opéra, that tinderbox of emotion. The count and the duke had shared the attentions of a lady somewhat earlier in their lives. Meeting this *femme fatale* on the arm of the count, the wife of the duke began insulting her. In almost burlesque fashion, the duchess tore off her pince-nez, throwing it to the ground. The count did the same to the wife of the duke, provoking a great public scandal. The king was brought into the matter, and placed the blame upon his brother, the Count of Artois, obliging him to make amends to the duke. The latter was not satisfied with such a gesture: this called for a duel.

The confrontation was arranged to take place in the woods, near La Muette. Just as the duel began (with swords, as befitting the very proud *noblesse d'épée*) an order "arrived" from the king forbidding the combat. In fact, the man who carried the order had also arranged the duel, and intervened only after face had been saved by the swords having crossed. Relieved, the two fell into each other's arms and made peace. A short, sweet exile in their country homes was arranged to show the king's displeasure. The gazettes of Paris, ever eager for this kind of fun, labelled the combat "the Fake Duel" mocking more than ever the aristocratic pretensions to ancient privilege.

In 1785, another famous duel took place. Reported in the public press, it was called the "Burlesque Duel between a Squirrel and an Elephant". *Again* it started in the theatre, that all-purpose forum of the 18th century. Dugazon was an actor at the Theâtre Français who was well-known for his sharp wit and caustic personality. He was called the "squirrel" by his friends. Another actor, Desessaerts, famous for his roles as a banker and moneylender, was very

overweight, and had to have special chairs built for him. His nickname was the “elephant”. The squirrel aimed his jokes at the elephant, an easy target.

Called upon to put on a play for a minister, Dugazon asked his colleague to join him. He told him that he should wear black mourning attire, as he was to play the part of a man who had just inherited a fortune. When they arrived at their destination, Dugazon boastfully pointed out to the audience of selected guests the black attire of Desessaerts, declaring that his colleague was so dressed “in honour of the recent death of a captive elephant in the king’s zoo”. Desessaerts took offence at the insult, which provoked general hilarity among the noble hosts. He challenged Dugazon to a duel in the forest the next day.

When the duel was about to begin, Dugazon, ever the comic, stopped the proceeding for a moment.

“My friend”, he said, “I have some scruples about this unfair match. You have more surface to hit than I do. Let us equalise our chances”. He took from his pocket a piece of chalk, and drew a circle on the stomach area of the rotund actor.

“Everything that hits outside of this circumference doesn’t count!”

The general laughter that greeted this speech softened the heart – and perhaps sobered the thoughts – of Desessaerts, who himself burst into laughter. They made up over a copious repast, paid for no doubt by the *bon vivant* Desessaerts.

One of the most singular of these numerous combats through the centuries pitted two women against each other. The Marquess of Nesle and the Countess of Polignac, two ladies of the highest standing in the

Court, were the principals in this curious affair. In the early years of the 18th century during the reign of the Regent, Philip of Orléans, Mme de Nesle was the object of many scandalous whispers in the Court; she had lived openly with several of the most important nobles, some of royal blood. Tiring of the Prince de Soubise, she turned her sights on the dashing Duke de Richelieu. Unfortunately, Richelieu, a famous rake of the time, had no intention of becoming monogamous for Mme de Nesle. Mme de Polignac was then one of his many mistresses, and he showed preference to her over all others. To settle the possession of Richelieu's fancy, Mme de Nesle decided upon a duel, to be fought in the Bois de Boulogne with pistols – notoriously inaccurate weapons even at close distances.

The scene was all Verdi: the two women arrived in the forest dressed as Amazons. A small crowd accompanied them and watched in fascination as Mme de Polignac wounded Mme de Nesle with a single shot in the breast. Triumphant after the duel, Mme de Polignac gloated over her success, leaving her rival spread on the ground attended by her witnesses and a large crowd of interested bystanders. When she came to her senses, Mme de Nesle delivered a speech worthy of grand opera, if we are to believe the very secret *Mémoires* of the Cardinal Dubois, himself no stranger to the turbulent life of the century. When asked by a young man who helped her to her carriage if the man for whom all this was done was really worth it, she replied: "He is surely the most loveable man in the whole Court. I am ready to shed my blood to the last drop for him. Every woman is trying to catch him, but I hope the proof that I offered in provoking this duel shows him the depth of my love, and that he will take me to him without any rival. I cannot hide the name of this man, the Duke de Richelieu, none other than the oldest son of Mars and Venus."[2]

We are not told by contemporaries whether this scene produced results in the lives of the protagonists, but the incident itself became one of the great legends of the woods.

Later in the 1770s another duel between women took place in the forest. The centre of attention this time was a gallant young singer of the Opera, an ex-soldier in the elite regiment of the King's Bodyguard. Two of the many ladies enchanted by this man, whose name was Chassé, carried away by passion, decided to engage in a duel for their lover's favours. We are told that both were elegant, and strong-willed. One was French, the other Polish. The duel was to be conducted with swords, a curious and quite daring exploit for our two *belles*.

Both participants fought with vigour and courage, the stuff of novels and romances. The Frenchwoman was wounded, and carried off to a monastery in the city to heal her wounds and do penance for her foolishness; the Polish lady was summarily conducted to the border and expelled from the country. Chassé himself, after a interview with our friend the Duke de Richelieu, was placed under interdict to incite women to like outrages again.[3] Such was the reputation of the forest that the king created a special police force to discourage duelling there.

Horse-racing

Today the racecourse of Longchamp sits on the edge of the forest, a further testimony of past practices.

The tradition of horse-racing in the forest goes back many centuries. The first recorded race took place in May 1651; starting from the Porte de la Muette (at the aforementioned wall), it proceeded through the woods

to Saint-Cloud and back to the Château de Madrid. There were but two horses, those of the Prince d'Harcourt and the Duke de Joyeuse; the latter's jockey won the race for a handsome prize.[4] Races were held regularly after that first encounter. By 1755, large crowds were coming to see these events. The races were organised by a subscription among the nobility who raced French-bred horses. This "club" soon became a permanent institution, and after the Revolution the Auteuil and Longchamp racecourses were carved out of the woods to institutionalise what had long been a traditional use of the suburban forest.

The Revolution and after

During the Revolutionary period, the forest,
which was Crown land, was left open
to the vagrant population, and many
a foul deed was perpetrated in the shaded groves.
The gazettes of the time are filled with stories:
murders and hold-ups, duels and deaths.
Among the more famous to have crossed swords
were the Count Latour-Maubourg
and the Revolutionary orator, Mirabeau.
The latter escaped with but a slight wound,
but public emotion ran high.

During the same period, thieves and the homeless roamed the woods, now unprotected by a royal guard. This new breed of outlaws included aristocrats like the Nuncio Monseigneur de Salamon who spent several years on the run in the forest, where he could be close to the city yet avoid the bloody arm of the reigning Terror.[5]

In 1789 the forest became a public area, and the terrible destruction of the woods was initiated by those seeking game, firewood or simply a secluded shelter.

Feeble measures were taken to protect the woods, but decrees could not replace the old system of a guarded preserve.

Lafayette was called upon by the municipal government to restore some semblance of order to the forest; he set up twelve guard posts at the twelve gates of the forest wall, with the charge of preventing further destruction and duelling. It was not until January 1791, when the municipal government established a fixed military outpost in the grounds of La Muette, that serious damage was brought to a halt. But by then the forest had been opened as a thoroughfare to the small town of Saint-Cloud, providing a shortcut to Versailles via Boulogne.

Revolutionary mobs were active in the forest. Robespierre had the Convention decree the Feast of the Supreme Being in May of 1794, with catastrophic effects upon the woods. A contemporary left this short account:

> "The night before this feast an immense crowd of people invaded the forest of Boulogne: in the twinkling of an eye, they stripped the trees of all their leaves and branches. The youngest plants fell under the assault of pitiless blows, and the old trees had all the magnificent boughs ripped from the trunks. Loaded down with this green bounty, the revolutionary vandals – made up of both sexes and all ages who held nature in as much contempt as art – appeared as a moving forest as they descended the Champs-Élysées to decorate the monument of the Great Tyrant of France".

The Revolution left the woods in ruin. Napoleon recognised the fact that urban parks were important for the growing city, and he organised municipal works to replant trees in the forest; he was also, of course, creating a natural barrier against troops who might

want to approach the city from the west. Under the Restoration the forest returned to the Crown as a private park.

War was what, in fact, destroyed the last great oaks in the forest. During the campaigns of 1814-15, the soldiers of Wellington and the Cossacks of Alexander I mercilessly cut down the majority of flammable trees for their bivouacs, leaving the forest denuded. Later attempts under the Restoration to replant oak trees did not succeed; it was decided that chestnuts would instead be used, as they provided good shade. Under these new trees, Charles X – the same Count d'Artois who had duelled there before the Revolution – came to hunt. He was the last of the monarchs to do so.

New traditions were born in the 19th century, and the woods became a famous, if not notorious, rendezvous for midnight lovers. Prostitution was also reported to be on the rise on the borders of the woods in the late 19th century, much to the horror – or supposed horror – of the bourgeois neighbours.

In 1841, a system of fortifications was planned for the city of Paris. The Bois de Boulogne suffered further amputation, as the fortification walls were built on the present location of the Boulevard des Maréchaux. After the uprising in Paris termed the Revolution of 1848, the forest – now no more than a large wood – was removed from the Civil List and in 1852 presented to the city of Paris by the new emperor, Napoleon III. The city was fast encroaching on the eastern side of the woods as bourgeois Frenchmen began to build townhouses along the newly designed streets south of the Champs-Élysées. The city government planned a vast promenade in the old forest, and began works to ensure a country setting for the new park. From 1853

to 1859, the landscape architect Varé and the city planner Alphand carried out the programme, and created what was to become one of the most famous urban parks in Europe. Much of what we see today was their doing, but behind it all was the guiding hand of the very bourgeois emperor, Napoléon III. He showed his attachment to the new pleasure-ground by riding there in his open carriage many a Sunday. By now the Bois de Boulogne had become part of that upper-middle class world of European capitals: country side tamed into a park amid the city dwellings. Henceforth it would be a reminder of pastoral delights, and provide a shared sense of urban estate.

2

Chapter II

The Château de la Muette

As suggested in Chapter one, the name "La Muette" was almost certainly related to the hunt; its original meaning in falconry was something close to a "moulting shed". Whatever fanciful origin is chosen for the present property, it is ironic that "muette" in its present modern spelling should also allude to something quite different from the hunt: the word calls up the image of a silent, secret place, where noise, rumour, laughter, song and speech are alien. Nothing could be further from life at La Muette over the centuries.

At least three châteaux were built on the site called La Muette, nestling against the eastern border of the forest. The first was constructed sometime between 1542 and 1549 as a hunting lodge; a second structure was built at the beginning of the 18th century, and greatly enlarged in the mid-18th century by the famous architect Gabriel; the remnants of this structure were consolidated, in the mid-19th century, into a large house; in 1921 that building was razed, and on another site in the park work began on the present modern structure, built in the style of an older 18th century building.

The place that has never changed its name over the past four centuries has seen much happen, many come and go. This is the brief story of that site – haunted by laughter and music, tears and whispers, and lastly, the

muffled voices of diplomacy, compromise and second-degree courtesies.

The first château

The previous chapter traced the history of the woods that formed the backdrop to the Château de la Muette. They were instrumental in providing peace and quiet, far from the Court and city. But first, we must locate the object of our attention: the first "Muette" near Paris was not, in fact, our château at all.

The royal family and the Court in the 16th and 17th centuries did not have fixed abodes, but moved about the country in a royal "Progress", a term that made the nobility tremble. The Court, in moving from one royal residence to another, lived off the hospitality of the nobles whose homes lay in their path. Such a descent could be ruinous even for a rich aristocrat. The practice was maintained by the king both as a means of checking an overambitious subject from accumulating too much wealth, and as a money-saving device. Among the favourite châteaux of the king were the ancient hunting castles of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in the north and Fontainebleau in the south. The Louvre was used only occasionally when the royal family were in Paris.

Francis I, ever the aggrandizer, built a small hunting lodge which he named "La Muette" in the forest of Saint-Germain; that place-name remains to this day. If we are to believe contemporary sources, the purpose of this "muette" was something closer to another understanding of the term: "The king called the lodge in Saint-Germain forest La Muette, as if to name a secret place, separated and closed off from the woods and everything about them".[6] At least one other "muette" already existed inside the city of Paris.[7]

The new beginning

Henry II (1529-1559) was drawn to the forest by the hunt, and the nearby Château of Madrid, recently built by his father, Francis I. He carved the property of La Muette out of the small village landholding of Passy. His son, Charles IX (1550-1574), the young and inexperienced pawn of political powers who feebly ordered the Saint-Bartholomew's Day Massacre, was also a frequent visitor to La Muette in his short life. Two years before his death, in 1572, he added onto the existing structure at La Muette; hereafter, the place was known as the "Château de la Muette", a name that was surely more impressive than its actual size. A representation by Dubreuil of this first château can still be seen in the Gallery of the Stags at Fontainebleau, where all the royal houses of the 16th century were painted in imitation of the Vatican's celebrated Hall of Maps.[8] From it, we can see that the château was more like a small country house, probably used as a relay for the hunt when the king and Court were staying at the nearby Château de Madrid.[9]

This first hunting lodge had

> "a quadrilinear form, with four towers, one at each extremity. All were identical in size. There were two stories to the building and round dormer windows gave light to the attic. In front of the lodge was a garden that had a curious triangular shape ending in a point. The whole was surrounded by a wall."[10]

The architect Pierre Chambiges was called upon to decorate this new dwelling. Chambiges was a member of the famous family of 16th century architects who were bridging the gap between the late flamboyant Gothic style and the new Renaissance ideas coming from the most powerful cultural centre in Europe, Italy. Chambiges was born sometime in the early part

of the 16th century, and learned his trade from his father who was developing new models for ecclesiastical architecture. Pierre was particularly interested in the use of ceramics, a technique developed in Italy, especially in and around Florence. Francis I had called upon one of the members of the della Robbia family to build his Madrid Château in the early years of the 16th century, and it is perhaps there – or at Fontainebleau, where other Italians were working away trying to create a competitive "renaissance" in France – that Chambiges perfected the techniques of ceramic decoration that were to make him famous. He contributed to the renovations of the Châteaux of Saint-Germain and Fontainebleau as well as Chantilly. He is said to have built the Château of Challeau – and the first Château de la Muette.

Due to some unfortunate crossing of identities, the small manor at La Muette was soon reputed to have been built by the famous Renaissance architect Philip Delorme. In fact, Delorme, who was the favourite architect of Francis I, was the master builder of the Château de Madrid nearby in the forest; this latter was erroneously identified in a treatise of the early 18th century as the Château de la Muette.[11] Other sources of the time give a more exact – and modest – account of the Château de la Muette during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Shortly after the Château was built as a hideaway on the brink of the forest, the first of the many interesting, witty and – in varying ways – dynamic women came into the picture. Marguerite of Valois (1553-1616), called Queen Margot in popular speech, was certainly a curious owner of La Muette. She was the daughter of Henry II and Catherine de Médicis. Her *Mémoires* are among the most amusing, indeed raucous, accounts of French Court life during the period. From 1569 – the time she came to take an active part in politics – until

her death, she played an important role in the internal affairs of the Court. For political reasons, she was married in 1572 to the Protestant Henry of Navarre, the future Henry IV, but this was to put no limits on her scandalous affairs with prominent men at the Court. Unable to keep out of the embroilments of the time that pitted the Ligue Party against dissident Protestant nobles, she was banished to a remote castle in Auvergne by Henry III. Her marriage to Henry of Navarre became problematic when the latter acceded to the throne of France after a judicious change of faith. Their married life was practically modern: both pursued love affairs at will, but neither really gave up on the matrimonial contract. It was only dynastic pressures that forced Henry to seek a divorce, as the union had produced no children. Margot refused to separate as long as the king's paramour, Gabrielle d'Estrées, was alive. After her death, Margot finally consented to an annulment of the marriage, in order to permit Marie de Médicis the possibility of marrying Henry. In 1605, she returned to Paris to live the rest of her life in great style, organising balls, parties and elaborate masquerades for her amorous friends.

It was upon her marriage to Henry of Navarre in 1572 that Charles IX gave Margot, his sister, the domain of La Muette among other lands nearby. One of the promenades of the present Bois de Boulogne is still called the Alley of Queen Margot. Although we know little of her use of this hideaway, we do know that she came here often after 1605. Childless, she was quite taken with the young dauphin, the future Louis XIII; in a gesture of displaced maternal love, she gave the five-year-old future king La Muette in 1606, although she continued to use it until 1616. Thus, La Muette passed into the register of Crown lands.

Marguerite was a precocious woman, and according to Tallemant des Réaux (1619-1692), that busybody and

tattle-tale of the 17th century, “never was there a person more inclined to love affairs”. It was said that when she was only eleven years old she started her whirlwind of trysts that was to last a lifetime. She is the subject of one of Tallemant des Réaux’s more piquant stories:

> “Marguerite always wore a great bustle under her dresses. It had many pockets all around; in each one she placed a box wherein she kept the heart of one of her lovers now dead. She was able to do this, because as they died, she had their hearts embalmed. She hung this apparatus every night over her bed in a cupboard which she locked tightly.”

This lugubrious practice did not seem to shock the Court, although how many pockets she had we are not told.

Margot was also bald at an early age. She kept a squadron of young blond-haired pages and valets in attendance at all times. Periodically, she would have them shorn to provide fresh hair for her; she always kept a supply in her one of her famous pockets.

Although famous in love, Marguerite was so fat that she had trouble getting through some of the doors with her oversized bustle and its trophies. Henry IV remained ever-frustrated by this woman, who retained the title of queen to the end of her days:

> “I am just waiting for the day when somebody will come to tell me that they have strangled the former queen of Navarre (Margot). I will sing the Canticle of Simeon!”

From one of her letters, it is clear that she lived off and on at La Muette until the end of her life. “I am going”, wrote Margot to Henry IV, “with the permission of your Majesty, on the 10 of July, 1605, to my house in Boulogne and there I will make my home…”

After the death of Margot, Louis XIII became the new owner of La Muette. He is said to have come to the hunting lodge but infrequently. He preferred the large hunting lodge at Versailles, further away from Paris in the middle of a larger forest. Upon his death, La Muette and Versailles came to his son, Louis XIV, along with all other Crown lands.

Louis XIV had other ideas for Versailles. At the beginning of his reign, he conceived the plan for a great palace outside the city, one not associated with the past gloom of Gothic and dungeon. Versailles was a perfect location – southwest of the city, not far from the royal residence of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, next to Saint-Cloud, and ready for full development according to the new canons of style that Louis felt were to be part of his great reign. After briefly visiting Vaux-le-Vicomte, the newly built château of his overweening Minister of Finance, Fouquet, Louis disposed of the ambitious minister, hired away his workforce and placed this small army of 10 000 workers under the direction of Charles Le Brun to transform Versailles. Architectural style, *décor*, paintings, gardens and antiquities – the whole project of Vaux was transferred to Versailles, including the royal emblem of the Rhodian Sun, taken directly from Vaux.

Louis evidently did not need the small hunting lodge at La Muette any longer. But he did need to protect the royal forest of Boulogne. There was also cash to be made if he could create and sell a title to the forest that some newly rich middle-class burgher might covet. Such a person came forward. Thomas Catelan de la Sablonnière bought the charge of "Captain of the Forest of Boulogne" and with this office, the hunting lodge of La Muette. The medieval practice of appointing a noble to protect the royal hunting grounds had fallen into disuse in the 16th century, but

Louis XIV saw an opportunity to revive it along with a host of other offices that had titles but no real functions; he sold these titles to the newly enriched town citizens. Usually, there were rents associated with these titles, so the Crown was selling future gains in exchange for fresh capital. Catelan enlarged the existing lodge, adding some outbuildings to the property; he also cleared some of the surrounding forest.

In 1705, Catelan sold his office of Captain and the property of La Muette to the Minister of Finance, Fleuriau d'Armenonville. The king in turn reorganised the office for the new incumbent, adding to it a rent of 12 000 pounds a year and the right to transmit the title and property to his son. This was, of course, more like a retreat for the rich and noble d'Armenonville than serious living quarters, although he is indeed reported to have made the house a "delicious living quarters" on the edge of the forest. In addition, d'Armenonville, a powerful personage during the Regency, was interested in gardening. He created and then extended the formal gardens of La Muette into an elongated parterre in back of the main body of the château, following the mode of the day. La Muette began to look like a proper château.

It was, however, too charming a prize to remain an underused country house.[12] One summer evening in 1707, the Duke of Burgundy, a memorable member of the royal family, with his wife and a large number of camp-followers, called on d'Armenonville. The master of the house invited them to supper. The *Mercure Galant*, that ubiquitous gossip sheet of the *ancien régime*, left an account of this first royal visit:

> M. d'Armenonville has greatly embellished the woods since he took over the charge of Captain of the Forest; he has also made improvements to La Muette, his country residence in that forest. It is one of the most agreeable mansions in or

around Paris, and the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy, having heard much about it, wanted to see it. Without warning d'Armenonville, who of course knew someday royalty would stop by for a visit, they resolved to call upon him at La Muette. Having heard of their approach, d'Armenonville went to meet them at the gate called the "green gate" which gave onto the forest. The Duchess wanted to take a long walk in the gardens of La Muette; she was dressed as an Amazon, as were some young ladies in waiting who accompanied her. After a walk, they went to the château to see the apartments. In the meantime, d'Armenonville and his wife hurriedly prepared an impromptu feast, flush with fruits and sweetmeats to match the tastes of their guests. However, they had not planned on a great number of guests, and had set only fifteen places at the main table. A second table was set for the entourage of the Duke, and a third was set up in the cabinet for those who found no place elsewhere. During this time, music was played, and the Duchess and her ladies-in-waiting danced. At eight o'clock, the party sat down for dinner, with the host and hostess serving the Duke and Duchess themselves. During the dinner, the front courtyard of the house was lit with torches, so that when leaving the guests could see their way about. When dinner was over, the Duke and Duchess danced again… and d'Armenonville had his servants set off fireworks to mark the occasion as a great honour to his household. Festivities ended at one in the morning, and the royal party returned to Versailles that night, accompanied by torch-bearing servants.[13]

Soon the Duchess of Berry, the niece of the Duke, made it clear that she wanted a country house close to

her father's castle of Saint-Cloud. La Muette was a perfect choice. Unfortunately, the house was not for sale. Such details were not to stop the strong-willed duchess. When she wanted something, she got it. La Muette had come into the sights of the immediate royal family, and the fortunes of the hunting lodge changed for ever.

The Regency

At the death of Louis XIV, his infant great-grandson, the future Louis XV, inherited the crown. Philip of Orléans became Regent of the Realm, and began to rule in the name of the infant king. Philip had grown up in the glory of Versailles, living at the apogee of power in the 1680s and early 1690s. The Court, however, according to contemporary sources, was not a place for a sensitive child. The dominant influence at Court, the king's secret wife, Mme de Maintenon, made sure that piety and religion were the public moral system; private morals were something else. The hidden life of Versailles was chronicled in caustic detail by a number of courtiers, but none to match the Duke de Saint-Simon, who observed that virtue of any kind was far from the minds of most as they idled away their days in that great playground.

Philip was no exception. In the limelight of the Court, yet unable to really influence the game of power, the future Regent spent most of his time gambling and riding with the hunt. In 1692, he married one of the recently legitimised daughters of the king, Mlle de Blois. His new wife was something of a *dévote* and allergic to the worldly life of the Court. From this unhappy marriage was born, in 1695, the future Duchess of Berry, Marie-Louise-Élizabeth de Bourbon.

From the outset, she was the apple of her father's eye. He could spare her nothing. She soon became a prominent pest in the Court, making public her regret at not having been born into the immediate royal family. She grew up in the late days of the reign of Louis XIV, when the decadent atmosphere, the demoralised nobility and the increasingly withdrawn and sullen king fed her appetite for excess.

It was perhaps the death of the old king and the appointment of her father as Regent in 1715 that triggered the duchess into action. If we are to believe the Duke de Saint-Simon, to tell the story of her many scandals would require "resorting to Latin" too frequently to satisfy the uneducated reader.[14] She took as her motto "Short and Sweet", and began one of the most memorable careers of debauch in those heady days of the Regency. This historic period was to last a brief eight years (1715-1723), ended only by the death of the Regent. His reign was to be the revenge for the pietistic and gloomy life of the Sun King's Court: known as a Satanist among other things, Philip had a reputation of free thinking and free living. His palace at Palais Royal became one of the most celebrated reception halls of Europe; located close to the theatres of the capital, he was able to organise gigantic soirées attended by the most frivolous and fun-loving figures of the capital. A man with sympathies for the non-aristocratic, he mingled freely with people from many walks of life. As long as they amused him, he entertained them. He had artistic taste, and his painting collection was one of the most famous in Europe.

As Regent, he was supposed to watch over the infant king, and ensure his proper upbringing. He spent much more time with his own daughter than he did with the king, and when she was unavailable, with numerous mistresses and lady friends.

The daughter of the Regent followed closely in her father's footsteps.

Two portraits of the duchess are worth recalling, as both were drawn by acute observers of human nature. The first was reported in a letter written by her grandmother, the Princess Palatine, Charlotte of Bavaria, the ever-sharp-tongued scourge of Versailles:

> "The Duke of Berry… thinks he has found the most beautiful woman in the world. She is not at all that, neither from her size nor from her looks. She is thick and stocky, with long arms and short hips; she walks awkwardly, and there is little grace in everything she does. She is always making faces, or looks as though she is about to cry. She had smallpox as a child, and carries the marks on her face… She looks much older than she really is. Her neck, her arms and her hands are her best parts, along with her legs and her feet, which are all very white. I cannot understand why she walks so strangely. With all of that, the Duke of Berry and the Regent think that Helen of Troy was not as beautiful."[15]

This catty account from a jealous grandmother needs to be seen in the light of the one drawn by the Saint-Simon, a more neutral observer in the Court, at least with regard to the duchess:

> "The Duchess of Berry was a prodigy of wit, but also of pride, ingratitude and folly; she was also headstrong and prone to debauch. She had been married for only eight days when she began to show signs of all of these vices…"

The arranged marriage with the Duke of Berry was imposed upon her, but she soon began to seek revenge. We hear of her fits of rage, her shrew-like behaviour with her new husband, and her mocking of the then-conventional values of religion and morality. She was

also given to drinking, and making a spectacle of herself when drunk. She was one of the celebrated scandals of the Court. Her power over her father only grew with these public scandals.

With the death of her husband in 1714, and the appointment of her father as Regent in 1715, the young duchess was now in a situation to match her ambitions with favours from her father. She requested and received additional rents, bringing her income to the astronomical sum of 680 000 pounds a year; her full household included more than 700 retainers. She badgered her father for a dwelling worthy of her status; he gave her the superb Luxembourg Palace, with its fine garden and ironic view of the nearby Paris Charterhouse. Before she took possession of the palace, the Regent had it remodelled for her and redecorated by Audran,[16] who later decorated La Muette. She went further: she wanted a captain of the guard, an honour reserved for the immediate royal family. Her father gave in and appointed a captain for her, as well as for her mother. She next asked for a guard to follow the captain's orders. Sixty regulars were placed at his command. She made frequent use of this display of power by moving about the city with her guard, a spectacle that was bound to cause jealousy and fear among the nobility. Among the many complaints that were registered concerning her behaviour, the following two incidents give an indication of both her daring and the importance of exterior signs of power in the *ancien régime*.

With her armed guard, the duchess once crossed Paris. Passing in front of the Tuileries palace, where the young king was living at the time, she ordered her well-trained marching soldiers to clash their cymbals and roll their drums to create the impression of an important passing. This caused great scandal to those members of the Court who were in residence, and a

formal complaint was put to the Regent that no mortal other than the reigning king was allowed such a display in the capital. On another occasion, the duchess, who was fond of the theatre, went to the Opéra with her military guard. Not far from the stage, she had a gold throne-like chair installed on a dais, with thirty small chairs settled for her guests; four of her guards stood at attention around the throne during the performance of *Sémiramis* while her own guard took up posts at the exits. The whole of worldly Paris declared itself in shock.

At the Luxembourg Palace, she received homage from the literati, the men of the theatre, the Church, and occasionally foreign envoys curious to see the famous duchess. She arranged a sort of throne room for herself there, and attempted to detour some of the traffic going to the Tuileries in search of the young king. The Luxembourg became synonymous with debauch: "The Duchess of Berry lives there in closed apartments which are scented with different perfumes, like an oriental palace, so much so that those who come to see her get a headache from the smells. She has 800 domestics, among whom there is a hired murderer who acts as chief of staff…" The walls of the city were filled with anonymous graffiti mocking the duchess, accusing her of every manner of infamy, including incest and murder.

It became imperative to find a country house where more private parties could be held far from the prying curiosity of town gossips and Court slanderers. The duchess remembered from her childhood the charms of La Muette; having heard of the hunting lodge and its discreet location, she turned to her father to arrange a forced sale of the property. Saint-Simon reports little of the behind-the-scenes moves to compel the ageing Captain of the Forest to surrender his home at La Muette:

> "In 1716, the Duchess of Berry brought – or rather, had the Regent buy for her – a small house at the entry to the Boulogne Forest. It was a very pretty little dwelling, with the forest in front of it, and a large, beautiful formal garden in back of it. It used to belong to the Captaincy of the Forest. Catelan greatly improved the grounds, and sold it to Armenonville: the property is called La Muette."[17]

She moved into the house in 1716, after having it redecorated to her taste. By this time, her life was a matter of public gossip. Smitten with love, she had a man named Rion nominated as captain of her guard, where she could flirt with him openly. Among other talents, this young rogue was an accomplished chemist, a profession viewed with some suspicion in an age when death by poison was a common cause of fatality in Court circles. Buvat, a witness of these events, left reports that Rion was a masterful distiller of alcohols – another weakness of Mme de Berry – and may even have discovered a love-potion to entrap the duchess. The Barnabite Father Laferriere, whose parish included La Muette, recounted that he "went often to see Rion, in the mornings, in his laboratory at La Muette, where alembics of different delectable alcohols whistled away". When she wasn't intoxicated or dashing through town in a fast carriage to a wild party, she could be seen at the Carmelite convent near the Luxembourg, where she retired on occasion to make amends for a scandalous lifestyle. Living life at this pace could only spell trouble.

She frequented La Muette during the years of the Regency, and is known to have held many an intimate party – some said orgies – in the house. Famous travellers curious to meet the duchess visited La Muette as they streamed towards Saint-Cloud to pay

homage to the Regent in his château. Among those prominent visitors figured the Czar Peter the Great. He came to stay overnight at La Muette in May 1717, during his visit to Paris.

The anonymous author of the *Gazette de la Régence*, another newspaper of the times, reported the life at La Muette during this period:

> "I went Sunday morning to Passy. Afterwards, I went to La Muette to see the apartments and the garden. Mme de Berry was absent in Paris. She came back on Tuesday, and spent the whole summer at La Muette. The château is a delicious little mansion, with very elegant furnishings. From her bed, the duchess can see the garden and all the agreeable objects in it. There is nothing but nice things to see. One eats very well there, and there are plenty of good wines. Mme de Berry hasn't gone that frequently with the hunt this year; God only knows if the long stays at La Muette are going to give rise to gossip, but princes are above vulgar talk and they live as they please."[18]

Gossip was indeed rife. In a society where telephones, televisions and photography did not exist, the power of the word was paramount. The ability to shine in a conversation, to find the elegant term or phrase to bring to life a reported event or person, was the power to persuade and to charm. The 17th and 18th centuries were imbued with all forms of orality: from the *précieuses ridicules* to the mystics and hysterics, life had only two dimensions: the present, to which one was a witness, and the absent future and past, to which one had access through language, spoken or written. Gossip was the distorted form of conversation, the vehicle by which the public became the personal.

Mme de Berry was the subject of much conversation and gossip during her short stay on earth. When she invited her father to come to La Muette for a "country party" in 1718, Paris was abuzz with the reports of the incestuous rendezvous she had fixed with her devil-worshipping father. The public was no less interested in her liaison with the captain of her guard, the above-mentioned Rion. The ever-vigilant Saint-Simon noted that:

> "The Duchess of Berry lived in the most incredible mix of high life and low life, a slave to her every desire; she alternated retreats in the Carmelite monastery with grandiose parties which were marked by the vile company and lewd propos of the guests. She went back and forth from debauch to great moments of regret, fearing the devil and death. She refused to limit herself in any way. At the same time, she was indignant that the world dared to speak about her, not caring however to try to hide from the public her many excesses. She became pregnant by Rion, trying all the time to hide this disgrace."[19]

The pregnancy came to term at La Muette, but the raucous living of Mme de Berry was not the ideal preparation for such an event. She fell ill, and seemed at death's door. When a priest was called by the Regent to administer the last rites, the clerk refused to administer them as long as Rion and Mme de Mouchy, confidantes and accomplices in vice, were still lodged at La Muette. The Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, de Noailles, had arrived in the meantime, to reinforce the ecclesiastical interdict even *in articuli mortis*. To no avail. Mme de Berry threw one of her well-known tantrums, hurling every available piece of glass and china against the doors and windows. She refused categorically to be separated from her lover and her confidante. Not even her father could persuade her to

rid herself of her two comrades in crime. She suffered a miscarriage as a result of her tantrums. In spite of her weakened state, she continued her lifestyle with zest.

The Regent and Mme de Mouchy, for different reasons, decided that Mme de Berry should be married to the entrepreneurial soldier Rion. Through a deft play on Mme de Berry's fears and desires, this was arranged in secret. When the news broke at the Court, it simply confirmed the opinions of those who considered the Regent and his daughter to be thoroughly debauched.[20]

Soon even the Regent became worried about his daughter's licentious behaviour. When she moved her household from Luxembourg to the Château of Meudon, not far from Paris, he decided to act. He ordered Rion to the Spanish frontier. To calm the spoiled princess, he went to see her at Meudon. Foolishly, and against the advice of those in her household, she organised a large banquet outside to regale her father on the occasion of his visit. Not having yet recovered from the miscarriage, she caught a severe cold and was packed off to a clammy bed. She decided to move to La Muette, so that her father could come more often to see her. Against all advice, she made the journey while still ill. For two months she agonised at La Muette, the bright lights and wild parties no longer a part of her life. The situation worsened in July 1719. "The pains which she felt could not persuade her to think of this life – and the diet that would be necessary to prolong it, nor to think of that other life, to which she was soon to be transported", reports Saint-Simon. She arranged herself in her bedroom, overlooking the gardens of La Muette, and in a theatrical style worthy of her vivacious character, held forth on the joys of her life and present state, the "mistress of both" speaking as a queen. The next day, it was apparent to all gathered

that she would not survive long; the Regent was sent for. He in turn sent again for a priest. After consulting with the royal physician Chirac, he decided to resort to more unorthodox methods. His experience with alchemists and magicians proved useful. He called for one Garus, who had a secret elixir reputed to be efficient in such cases. Garus administered the drug potion to the dying princess; she immediately began to show signs of recovery. Garus left instructions with the Regent that whatever happened, she should eat or drink only the prescribed diet until she was out of danger. Chirac, jealous of this intruder in his domain, managed to give the duchess a potion of his own making, a purgative. Not surprisingly, such "medical" treatment proved fatal. The duchess fell into an immediate semi-coma; Chirac and Garus disputed the cause, each blaming the other for the situation, while the helpless father watched the life of his beloved daughter ebb away. She died the next day, 20 July.

The Regent never recovered from the loss. The body was placed in the chapel of La Muette and the rites of the dead were sung, there where so many a madrigal and saraband had been heard. When the autopsy was performed, the doctors found that her brain had been reduced to half its normal size, and that many of her internal organs had begun to putrefy. A moral reading by the puritanical doctors? We shall never know.

Her heart was buried, as was the custom of the royal family, at the Royal Abbey of Val-de-Grâce in Paris; her body was taken by carriage and funeral train of forty black-decked servants to the Abbey of Saint-Denis, the traditional resting place of the French monarchy. No prelate wished to preside over her last rites. Her grandmother, not a writer to mince her words, intimated that what she had learned of the life of her granddaughter after her death "could not be written down". She left few mourners, except those

anxious to be invited to the next revel in her secret gardens at La Muette and the many retainers attached to her household.[21] Thus this French forerunner of the Great Gatsby left her world behind, and a mark on that summer place where she had lived so much of the "short and sweet" life that was hers.

2

Chapter III

The Second Château – La Muette Under Louis XV

At the death of the Duchess de Berry, her debts were such that a special national tax had to be raised to pay them. The Regent, in the convenient position of being able to manage the young king's treasury and at the same time provide for his own needs, transferred the title of La Muette to the nine-year-old child for an undisclosed sum of money, in part to pay off debts. Saint-Simon tells us that:

> "The Regent made a gallant gesture to the king, and one to suit the age of the young monarch. He proposed to the king that he take the country house of La Muette, so that he could amuse himself and organise country parties. The king was delighted. He thought he finally had something entirely to himself."

The post of Captain of the Forest, to which La Muette was attached, also changed, as the vilified Rion was banished from Paris.

With the transfer of La Muette to Louis XV began the most colourful and lively period of the château. La Muette had once again entered into the accounts of the kingdom as a royal domain.

The new owner, the child Louis XV, loved La Muette. It was a country outing to a forest retreat for the child-

king, still under the watchful eye of the Regent. The new Governor of La Muette, Henry Herbert de Courtavel, was an experienced soldier, a veteran of the Rhine campaigns of Louis XIV, and, if we are to believe the spiteful Saint-Simon, a regular toady. The task of governor was pleasant, as it entailed little more than house-sitting when the owners were away in town.

The Regent and the governor embarked on a programme to refurbish the château, giving it a more regal air and a *décor* suited to the play-world that Watteau so aptly portrayed in his painting. A number of outbuildings were added to the château, scattered over the large grounds. The existing gardens were reorganised, formal gardens with a perspective from the rear facade of the château were introduced, and a rustic pastoral setting was designed to the north of the château.[22] La Palatine tells us that "the king took his horseback lessons at La Muette. There (in the rustic section) were cows, lambs, chickens, goats and pigeons". A small simulated country environment was constructed for the young boy; this idea would become popular among aristocrats in the 18th century, as evidenced by Marie-Antoinette's miniature farm at Versailles. The young king, in the company of the governor, went on his first hunt at La Muette in 1719, killing ten wild game in the nearby forest of Boulogne. But the blood sport brought out the worst in the young Louis. A cruel streak in the young monarch surfaced when he brought his pet white deer to La Muette. To the shocked surprise of those courtiers who accompanied him, he announced that he was going to "hunt" his favourite pet deer. The deer was inseparable from the young boy, but there in the park he had it forcibly dragged away from him some distance. He took aim with his weapon, and wounded it with an arrow. The dying animal, released by the

servants holding it, ran to his master, licking
his hand. Louis majestically had it moved away again,
and finished it off with another missive
from his miniature bow and arrow set.

Vouteval, the governor, ever with an eye
on advancement and preferment at the Court,
organised pastoral picnics and children's parties
at La Muette for the king. The governor was said
to carry the key to the milk barn, where the king's
fresh milk was fetched every day, as proudly
as the Garde des Sceaux carried the Privy Seals
of the Kingdom. At the beginning of the 18th century,
there was a stream that passed to the north
of the property, somewhere near the present-day
Porte de La Muette. There the king would wade
in the creek catching small fish and crayfish loitering
in the royal domain.

During the 1720s and 1730s, the king visited
La Muette with increasing frequency, delighting
in the informal surroundings and its proximity
to Paris and Versailles. Towards the end of the 1730s
there was a proposal to give La Muette to the Infanta
of Spain as a wedding present, but nothing
was resolved and the petulant Spanish bride
was offered another more austere castle in the south.
The king remained the master of his favourite château.
He used it not only for retreats from the Court,
but as a private house where he could divest himself
of the formal, public nature of the Court and play
either squire or farmer as the mood took him.
It is recorded that he often made meals himself
in the kitchens, overseeing the few servants
who worked closely with him. He took particular care
to follow the seasons at La Muette, watching
the spring ushered in with flowers and the nearby
woods beckon with ghostly branches during
the winter months.

Music became a feature of La Muette. After one of the numerous hunts the king had organised in the Bois de Boulogne, he retired to La Muette for the entertainment of restful music and theatre which had been organised in the château, a scene right out of Lancret or Watteau: "Monsieur Anoche, actor of the Opera Comique, dressed in the costume of Pierrot, entertained the king, and by songs and short skits greatly pleased His Majesty."

The new king confirmed the fun-loving orientation of the kingdom that was to be the hallmark of the early 18th century. As he grew into young adulthood, he spent little time on matters of state, preferring to leave such professional problems to a series of ministers who ran the government in his name. Louis turned his attention to good living: La Muette had found its true vocation.

Meanwhile, a libertine age had dawned – an era when financial speculation made and broke fortunes overnight, and when the traditional values of religion were further eroded by carefree, moral short-termism.

The amorous life of the king became a matter of public gossip. Although very attached to his queen (there were ten children born between 1724 and 1737), he quickly took up the habits of the senior aristocratic advisors who ran the kingdom in his name. The Count Maurepas reported in his *Mémoires* one particular incident which took place at La Muette:

> "Thursday, January 24 1732, the king, then a boy of twenty-two, was dining at La Muette with about twenty courtiers. As dessert was being served, the king stood up and drank to the health of his secret love. After a number of speeches about the favourable points of different women at the Court, the king threw his glass to the ground, breaking it.

> Everybody present followed suit. They then began to try to guess the name of the lucky woman… The king confessed his secret passion for the Countess of Mailly."[23]

D'Argenson, the indefatigable chronicler of the weaknesses and vice of the early 18th century, noted in his diaries that the king became increasingly reckless with his extramarital affairs. La Muette was a convenient hideaway for royal parties and intimate evenings, given that "the ground floor and the private rooms of the king at La Muette had numerous entries and exits". By 1736, the journals and gazettes carried the gossip to the general public. Each fresh set of tracks down the Chaussée de la Muette was noted by the curious paparazzi of the times, and reported faithfully to the press. Extravagant dinners followed weekend parties of hunting and play-acting in the extensive gardens of the château. It became a point of honour to be invited by the king to La Muette. "The famous dinners of La Muette went very far indeed", says d'Argenson, "and therein lies the root of the evil. Stomachs are full afterwards, there has been rousing fun, but one forgets one's health in all of it. The king always seems in bad mien, and thinnish. Mme de Mailly is looking different every day, and I fear the consequences of such debauch for the king who is beginning to understand the delights enjoyed by his subjects."

The château itself needed considerable work after the death of the Duchess de Berry. It was decided that the small mansion would be completely rebuilt by adding on new parts and embellishing those that remained. To accomplish this task, the king appointed Jacques Gabriel and his son Jacques-Ange Gabriel, both of whom worked on the reconstruction from 1734 through 1742.[24] The older Gabriel was the first architect of the realm, a famous neo-classical

artist; but it was his son who carried out much of the work at La Muette, as he was to do so often in other royal residences in the years to come. No expense was spared in the rebuilding. Meanwhile the king continued to use La Muette for his hideaway, and accelerated his visits to the forest retreat even as the rebuilding programme advanced. In 1737, he visited at La Muette with the Duke of Luynes who commented in his diary that:

> "The king visited the new building work of Gabriel which had been recently finished. The whole of the facade facing the front courtyard had been brought forward to create a vestibule with a front door over which the king's bedroom was built. In the basement, a number of rooms had been built for the servants. There were some twenty-seven or twenty-eight people living at La Muette."[25]

Jacques-Ange Gabriel remarked that:

> "The new salon is gracious in its simplicity.
> All the wainscoting and woodwork
> has been installed and prepared.
> The old salon which gives onto the garden is
> redone in a like manner. Nothing remains
> to be done except to install the two tapestries
> which were made at the Gobelins,
> one showing a map of Marly, the other a map
> of La Muette. The billiard room is finished,
> and the mirrors are installed, and it is much
> better than the previous decoration of paintings.
> The parquet floor has been laid in the king's
> bedroom suite, and the chimneys are installed.
> The hallways are well illuminated
> by the small windows. I hope that His Majesty
> will be happy with all that has been done."[26]

Several of the properties in the commune of Passy were annexed to the property of La Muette for greenhouse

constructions and seedling farms. A pheasant coop was constructed on the northeast side of the property (today recalled by the Rue de la Faisanderie). The new château was an elegant building in the best tradition of the French 18th century neo-classicism promoted by Gabriel.

The building programme was to be carried out intermittently over the next twenty years. The important restorations and improvements to the principal royal residences were increasing drains on the treasury, and La Muette had to wait on occasion for favourable budget conditions. But the public came to know La Muette more than ever in the mid-18th century.

The roving eye of the king made La Muette a standard joke in the 1740s as a place for "secret" rendezvous with mistress and lover. "To go to La Muette" meant in general parlance that one was planning an amorous tryst in some secret place. It was at this time that La Muette also acquired the nickname of the "Deer Park", so sinister in the annals of Roman history. Fantastic rumours circulated about the carrying-on in the park of La Muette. Feeding on such stories, the press whipped up public scorn – and perhaps not just a little jealousy – for the fun-loving monarch and the *ancien régime* itself.

The king did little to allay this mood. He installed his mistress in the nearby Château of Madrid – all the easier to arrange rendezvous. Pauline-Felicity de Mailly, one of the king's favourites during this time, was forced into an arranged marriage when gossip became too loud. The king masterminded the ceremony, an unusual step even in those times; when the wedding day approached, the king and much of the Court retired to La Muette. Madame de Mailly was living at the Madrid address, waiting for her new

husband, the Count of Ventimillia. Louis rode over to Madrid with a good number of courtiers, and "gave the bride away". He also offered his own nightshirt to Ventimillia for the wedding night, a coy reminder to all who had been there first. Gossips said that the king not only offered his nightshirt, but that he actually took advantage of an old feudal custom: the "right of bedding" the bride. We were one step closer to 1789.

A son was born to Madame de Mailly in 1741; the courtiers liked to call him Half-Louis, in mockery of the coin of the realm.

There were five sisters in the family of Madame de Mailly. In seriatim, Louis took each as a mistress, sometimes two simultaneously. But it was the fifth sister, Madame de Châteauroux, who besotted him. She was the object of his unswerving love. He endowed her with great wealth, plundered from the public treasury. He organised numerous parties and receptions at Versailles, the Louvre and La Muette for his mistress. When she died in the early 1740s, the king was inconsolable. He closed himself in at La Muette with friends of Madame de Châteauroux for weeks on end.

The destiny of France was farthest from his mind, and the frivolity of his reign was beginning to take its toll on the reputation of the monarchy and the political stability of the nation.

The fortunes of La Muette and, ultimately, the *ancien régime*, were altered forever by a contrived encounter northeast of Paris in the forest of Sénart. In February 1745, the king, having lost his last and most loved mistress, was on the lookout for a new favourite. He attempted to reverse the order of attentions by asking Mme de Châteauroux's next oldest sister (the fourth in the family) to become his mistress again. Sensing

danger in this situation, she wisely "declined" the honour. Depressed, the king went on one of his usual hunts into the Forest of Sénart, where he met the charming Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson. This rendezvous had been organised by friends of the king whose eyes were ever open for new distracting companions for the fun-loving monarch. The king fell for her immediately, and as happened with Louis XIV's infatuation with Madame de Maintenon, he soon came under her total sway. The Court disliked her from the beginning, as she was not of noble extraction. "The shopkeeper", as they liked to call her, had her revenge. In 1745, the king perused the titles of extinguished noble family lines, and came up with the Pompadours, a defunct Limousin clan. He bestowed it upon her, and her new morganatic husband with numerous revenues; he took the bold step of introducing the new Madame de Pompadour to the Court at Versailles. Like all the royal mistresses, she was shy with regard to the formalities of Versailles, a palace where she had no real following nor any feeling of being accepted. Instead, she installed herself at La Muette, which was still undergoing repairs and construction work. She spent six years off and on at La Muette, overseeing much of the interior decoration in the château.

Her own Château de Bellevue was constructed on the south side of the Bois de Boulogne, on the hills overlooking the Seine near the royal Château at Meudon. "La Pompadour", as she was to be called by historians, was a remarkable woman who compared favourably with two other giants of the age: she had the character and force of Maria Theresa of Austria and the stamina and intelligence of Catherine of Russia. Her hold on Louis was absolute. She was a woman of her age, imbued in the artifice of the Enlightenment. Her middle-class origins made her a stickler for taste and refinement; her native intelligence inclined her

towards the intellectual discussions of the day. Voltaire, no pushover in discourse, became an ardent fan of hers. The Court detested her, but continual attempts to discredit her failed. Actually, in spite of the judgement of Sainte-Beuve that "the destiny of the Nation was for twenty years played out in the bedroom of a mistress", her political influence seems today to have been rather benevolent. She protected men like Choiseul and Bernis from royal wrath, and introduced a reasonable level of political discussion in the Court. Her protection of men and women of letters was exemplary for the times.

Mme de Pompadour had a number of residences scattered around Paris, including the Hotel d'Évreux (the future Élysée Palace), La Celle, Champs, and her beloved Bellevue (the beautiful view was towards Paris, occupying the site of Meudon-Bellevue today). She was a frequent resident of La Muette, where she spent time with the king away from the prying eyes of the Court. D'Argenson writes that:

> "The king went today to La Muette (in 1748) to have dinner with the Marquise de Pompadour. La Muette is a new establishment since it has been rebuilt, improved and added onto. But a lot was spent for very little beauty."[27]

She counted among her friends and protégés Crébillon Fils, Gresset, Marmontel, Buffon, Diderot, d'Alembert, Helvétius, Turgot, Duclos, Rousseau and Voltaire. It is not recorded whether she brought any of these luminaries to La Muette, but it is conceivable that in her many attempts to gain favour for her friends, she may have arranged discreet meetings at La Muette with the king in an informal setting.

By the end of 1745, much of the work had been finished on the outer parts of the building.

The façade facing the garden had been redone some years earlier; the courtyard façade, that which visitors saw first, was completed by Jacques-Ange Gabriel in 1746. Over the period 1745-60 Louis used La Muette frequently, often for extended stays with his family. His son, the dauphin Louis, also found his pleasure in the small domain. The monarchy itself was becoming accustomed to the new taste of the age, and moving towards bourgeois comfort and reclusion rather than regal ceremony and display. La Muette was but a continuation of the mentality that built the Grand and Petit Trianons at Versailles. In 1749, the king held sessions of the Council of State at La Muette, and reviewed regiments of Mousquetaires in the forest near the château. By 1750, further work was being carried out on the property, as evidenced by the reports in the press:

> "At the Château de la Muette,
> in the Bois de Boulogne, there are a large
> number of improvements being made.
> A large wall which borders the forests was taken
> down to extend the vegetable garden
> and make room for cut hedges
> which now frame a great terrace, built in stone.
> There is even a plan to tear down a few
> of the outbuildings that have been built
> in the last three years in order to rebuild them
> in another manner elsewhere: all this so
> that one would be able to see
> the Château of Bellevue on the other side
> of the river."

This last project, to create a clearing through the forest to the south of La Muette so that the king could see Bellevue, was never carried out, nor was the King's plan to modify the façade of La Muette to give it more harmonious proportions. Failing finances were the reason, in that mid-century lull before the storm of the Revolution.

However, the king did open La Muette to the new learning so characteristic of the times. In 1751, he installed a science laboratory on the property of La Muette; it was the heir to the potion laboratory installed not far away in Passy during the times of Mme de Berry. The learned Benedictine Dom Noël, one of the great amateur scientists of his time, was made master of the science laboratory. The *Gazette de France* of 1757 records:

> "The king had a small pavilion built at the extremity of the property of La Muette; here he moved the eight-foot telescope of Noël. Dom Noël also presented the king with a pneumatic machine which was set up with many other scientific instruments at La Muette."[28]

Unfortunately, the importance of mirror surfaces for telescopes had not yet been entirely understood at this time, and the telescope remained ineffective. Later, the king expanded the scientific laboratory, buying another building on the edge of the royal property where he had all the scientific instruments installed.[29] Part of this curious building subsisted until 1912, when it was finally torn down. The Abbé Nollet, one of the celebrated physicists of his time, often came to La Muette to conduct his experiments on electricity, not far from the manor house in Auteuil where Benjamin Franklin stayed while in Paris.[30] During this time, the salons of the château received the famous intellectuals of the age.

In 1751, the great wrought-iron grills were erected in front of the château, allowing a view of the gardens through the bars. It was the talk of Paris, and the marvel of the gazettes of the day. The summer and autumn days of those halcyon years of the mid-18th century were the heyday of La Muette.

The Duke de Luynes, with a keen eye for the pleasures of the day, left a description of one of those memorable feasts held in the play-pen of the ageing king.

> "The king arrived at La Muette towards eight o'clock, followed by the queen… The queen was quite surprised to see the changes at La Muette. It had doubled in size. Upon entering the château itself, there was a large entry hall in which a dining table for twenty-four guests had been set; in the salon, another thirty guests were to be seated at tables. The dining room itself was to the right of this salon. To the left of the salon was a drawing room, followed by another which gave onto the spacious gardens. In the first drawing room hung a great white tapestry on which flowers had been painted in oils, all to marvellous effect. The doors and the curtains were all done in similar decor. All was done to perfection...There were no games as usual at such gatherings, neither before nor after dinner."

What followed was an "intimate" dinner of some sixty guests, many of them princes of the royal family.

It was during this period that the king had the idea of tearing down the old château and building another one much larger, and with a southern façade facing the château of Bellevue. The Seven Years' War put an end to that royal folly – estimated at the sum of two million pounds of the time. Already the treasury was empty from mismanagement of the royal purse and the costly wars carried out around the globe. Louis, says D'Argenson:

> "wishes to build a new home to lodge his whole family at La Muette when they come with him. This paternal attention, this goodness which the king shows for his family, is the cause of many excessive expenditures, as the facile way in which the king is able to order things leads him to all sorts of follies. So do virtues turn to vices, in the hearts of men who lack firmness

and good sense. The king is kind to his loved ones, and hard on his subjects."

By 1760, improvements on La Muette had reached a critical stage. The famous architect Soufflot had become an associate of Gabriel, and was charged with making the final installations for the gardens, using what finances were left. Soufflot reported that he was able to plant many of the desired trees and hedges in the far gardens in spite of the cutbacks in the budget. One contemporary left an eyewitness description of the gardens in the late 1750s:

> "Leaving the château by the rear doors, there is a parterre of flowers on both sides of the central alley. Further away are two star formations of lawn, in the centre of which are two marble figures, one of a huntress and another of a nymph by Flamen. These two statues are separated by a row of tailored trees which are planted in pots. This avenue extends towards the end of the property via a great lawn decorated by a group of statues cut from stone representing Pluto carrying off Prosperpine when she is about to draw water from Arethusa in Sicily. At the end of the property is a circular terrace which gives onto the open forest."

The new La Muette was also a treasure-house of artworks. One account gives an inventory of the horde:

> "Under the Regency, there were not that many works of art. There were twelve small paintings by Watteau representing 'Chinese Figures'; there were twelve others, 'Diverse Chinese and Tartar Figures' as well as six other Chinese subjects... The first set was engraved by Boucher, the second by Jeaurat and the third by Aubert. A little later, the château was embellished by four paintings of the best student and imitator of

Watteau, Lancret; they represented the Four Seasons. These were first shown in the Salon of 1738 and are today in the Louvre. Towards 1744, Louis XV had much of the château rebuilt and added many works of art. In the vestibule, there were four large paintings of battles: *The Siege of Orsog* by Van der Meulen; *The Siege of Réz*, by the same painter; *The Siege of Mons* in 1691 and *The Siege of Namur* in 1692. These latter two were painted by Martin, and called 'Of the Battles' in imitation of Van der Meulen. Over the antechambers of the king were four pendents by Dumont: *Victory*, *Peace*, *Abundance* and *Generosity*. In a place of honour, in the dinning room, was the beautiful life-sized portrait of Louis XV. It was accompanied by two paintings of the hunt by Oudry: *The Wolfhunt* and *The Boarhunt*. Over the doors were the four other paintings of Oudry which were shown at the Salon of 1759: *The Deerfight*, now in the Louvre, *Fox Killing a Pheasant; Vulture Seizing a Hare*, and *Dog Chasing Ducks in Reeds*. The salon of the château was decorated with two large paintings: *The Rape of Europa* by Boucher and *A Feast of Bacchus* by Natoire. The small chapel had a magnificent small *Holy Family* by Raphaël, which is now in the Louvre, as well as a *Visitation*, copied from Raphaël. The garden was filled with statues: a *Diana* (Lemoine), *Clytiea Changed into a Sunflower* (Lepautre); a *Huntress* (Flamen); a *Nymph Returning from Fishing* (Flamen), a *Huntress with Arrow* (Poirier) and a large stone group of *Pluto Carrying off Prosperpina.*"[31]

The château had been decorated as a wealthy citizen's manor might have been. The age of transition had transformed the monarch's taste from the ceremonial to the intimate. Pastels and rococo colours ran riot in the gilded salons of La Muette.

In 1763, Madame de Pompadour died at the age of forty-two, accelerating the decline of the monarchy. The king seemed relieved that the woman who had such power over him was finally leaving the scene. Watching from his window in Versailles as the funeral cortege left the palace grounds in very inclement weather, the king is said to have murmured, "The Marquise will not have good weather for her trip". Her vast fortune was left to her brother; the sale of her many collections of paintings, furniture and personal items took a full year, heralding the orgy of auctions that would disperse the royal belongings some thirty years later. Diderot, who had observed the rise of Mme de Pompadour, left the following epitaph:

> "What remains of this woman who drained us of men and money, leaving them without honour and without energy, ruining the political system of all of Europe: the Treaty of Versailles, which will last as long as it lasts, the *Amour* of Bouchardon, which will be admired for all time, some jewels made by Guay which will be admired by future antiquaries, a good, small painting by Vanloo which one will look at from time to time, and a handful of dust."

So was intoned the first sound of the death knell, not of a person or an era, but of a way of life.

"Naturam expelles furea tamen usque recurret"

The king was fifty-four when La Pompadour died. Within five years he had lost his first-born son, the dauphin and the dauphine, as well as the queen herself. One might have thought this would engender a form of wisdom and prudence. Quite the contrary: the king soon fell under the influence of a woman who was to precipitate events and galvanise public opinion

against the monarchy. La Muette continued to provide the location for many of the excesses of the foolish king, and it had become a synonym for the excesses of Roman antiquity. But it was Mme du Barry who brought the reign of the king to a pathetic end.

Marie-Jeanne Bécu was born out of wedlock to a seamstress in 1743. She was apprenticed to dressmakers in the capital – an ideal profession to attract the attention of aristocratic patrons with her evident charms. She became known as Mlle Lange. In her professional capacity, she met a minor aristocrat, the Chevalier du Barry. He brought her into his service as manager for one of his gambling houses in Paris. There she met Lebel, one of the king's valets who was frequently on delicate missions for his master. Marie-Jeanne met Louis through Lebel, and her career at the Court took off. The king arranged for a quick marriage to the brother of du Barry the gambler, and had Marie-Jeanne presented at Court as the Countess du Barry. In spite of the massive resistance of the nobility, including the king's own daughters, Mme du Barry imposed herself at Versailles as the pleasure-seeking, carefree spirit that would provide the last unbridled laughter in that sombre place. She began to meddle in politics, securing the decree that eliminated Choiseul, the most competent minister of the king; he was replaced by an accomplice of du Barry, the notorious Meaupou. The latter ruined what was left of the royal finances, and exacerbated the political situation beyond repair. The Court, hostile to the senile king and his mistress, took every occasion to leak news of the depravity and follies at Versailles. Public opinion soured further as the monarchy entered its last days.

Her influence over the king was particularly important in dealing with the parliaments. These ancient bodies

represented the only bulwark against royal caprice, and although they were differently constituted according to the time and place in which they were created, the parliaments had been, since the 17th century, a serious impediment to royal whims. Du Barry is said to have installed Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I of England fleeing the Parliamentarians in London (given to her by Meaupou!) over her bed where Louis could gaze upon it when he came to her quarters. She quipped:

> "Well, France [her name for Louis], you see that picture? If you let the parliaments do as they wish, they will cut off your head, as the English Parliament did to Charles."

Louis needed no encouragement in ignoring his responsibilities as king. He systematically opposed any steps towards gradual reform in the kingdom, unaware of the growing gridlock conditions of the country.

Du Barry spent much of her time at La Muette, where she found the privacy and intimacy of a small château more to her liking, far from the Court at Versailles or Marly. It may have been at La Muette that the apocryphal phrase known to every French school child was heard. One day, when du Barry was waiting for her breakfast in bed which Louis was preparing for her, she called out: "France, be careful, the coffee is boiling over!" Louis is reported to have replied. "I don't give a damn; after me, the deluge."

In 1770, the Marquis de Beringhen, Governor of La Muette, died. He was replaced by another actor in the pre-Revolutionary scene who was to have a direct influence on the events at the end of the century. Charles de Rohan, Prince of Soubise and Épinay, Duke of Rohan-Rohan and Ventador, was an important noble with direct links to the royal family. Although his military career was chequered,

he remained a royal favourite. He ingratiated himself with "La du Barry", even going so far as to marry a close relative of his to her nephew. He met her often at the salon of his mistress, Mme de L'Hôpital. Mme de l'Hôpital's salon was a playground for the wicked in the twilight of the regime. The Duke of Rohan was made a minister by Louis XV, and held his title during the first years of the reign of Louis XVI.

Rohan lived in the great mansion built by his grandfather in the Marais which today houses the National Archives of France. The architecture of the building is an advertisement for the gay and playful life that was acted out there. Rohan, last governor of the château, came often to La Muette, and fulfilled his duties with discretion and attention. He died in 1787, on the eve of the Revolution.

On 15 May 1770, the young Marie-Antoinette of Hapsbourg, the bartered bride of the new Dauphin Louis, arrived at La Muette. The night before her wedding, yet another gigantic feast was organised in this delightful house. She was met by the king and his mistress, as well as a number of courtiers. A contemporary account of the first meeting between the king and his granddaughter speaks eloquently of the tensions in the air:

> "The king, blinded by a sentiment unworthy of a king and a father of a family, had the young princess, the royal family and the great ladies of the Court dine with Mme du Barry. The Dauphine was mortally wounded by this act. She was quite upset, but she managed to carry on through the dinner with composure, and she made no fuss in public. The king and the Court returned to Versailles; Marie Antoinette remained with her entourage at La Muette to spend the night."[32]

Mme du Barry never returned to La Muette, which became a residence for the Dauphin and his wife. With funds from the public treasury, she had a small château built at Louveciennes, where she was able to retire from the spiteful environment of Versailles.

In April 1774, the king contracted smallpox and died, accompanied to the end only by his three daughters, Mmes Adélaïde, Victoire and Sophie. His body was so disfigured that it could not be put on public view. It was instead placed inside three successively smaller coffins, and drenched in lime to avoid contagion. The last of the absolute Bourbons died with Louis, and the lights at La Muette were dimmed for ever.

His reign ended an era; his death set the stage for the change of status for the populace, from subjects to citizens of an urban public that had grown weary of the excesses of a king they no longer believed was appointed by Divine Will. As for the aristocratic population – in the words of Tacitus – they could stomach neither the illness they had contracted nor the consequences of the remedies it required.

2

Chapter IV

La Muette – The Twilight

With the death of Louis XV, the new king – just nineteen years old – began to repair some of the damage done by his grandfather's long and profligate reign. He banished Mme du Barry to the Abbaye de Pont-aux-Dames. He and his young wife, Marie-Antoinette, chose La Muette as their temporary Paris residence; the immediate royal family had begun to show signs of contagion, having been with the dying king in his last days, and it was necessary to stay far from Versailles. Even those ministers who had seen the king in his final illness were kept at bay. La Muette provided an ideal solution, being close to the Versailles, Marly and Paris.

A letter sent by the young king to the able minister Maurepas sums up the desperate situation Louis found when he took hold of the reigns of government:

> "M. Maurepas, in the sorrow that afflicts me and which I share with the whole nation, I recognise the duties that I must meet. I am the king, and this term says much of what is expected of me. But I am but twenty years old, alas! I do not have the experience or the intelligence which are required by this situation, and what is more, I cannot even communicate with my ministers, as they all attended the late king in his last illness. The certitude that I have of your uprightness, your honesty and integrity, as well as your knowledge of the affairs of State and

your prudence in carrying out actions,
all conspire to make me ask that you come
to my aid with your advice. Come back,
therefore, as soon as you can to La Muette,
where I will wait for you, praying that God keep
you in good health."

The reign of Louis XVI began at La Muette. Suddenly the château, little known to the general public, became a famous name. The public gathered before the gates along the great Chaussée de La Muette to hear the king, and gather intelligence of the new directions that state policy would take under his reign. Mme Campan, a faithful witness of those times, left an account of the throngs that marched so peacefully to the golden grills that fronted the château: "La Muette drew such crowds that from the first rays of sunlight they gathered at the outer grills of the château. Cries were heard all the day long of 'Long Live the King!' They began at six in the morning and went practically uninterrupted until nightfall. The hopes for better times that were born with the new king, and the disfavour in which the last king was held, caused this emotion." La Muette was the last theatre for such royalist enthusiasm in the *ancien régime*.

The king and queen received the official condolences of the whole Court at La Muette. Marie-Antoinette made her first wrong moves with the Court during this ceremony, which lasted several days. Prompted by some childish remarks of her lady-in-waiting, she seemed to mock the elderly and stately duchesses and princesses who vied with each other to offer condolences on the death of Louis XV. The gazettes of the time got hold of the news, and published widely that the new queen was young and frivolous, uninterested in time-honoured traditions of the monarchy. This initial unpopularity was to grow over

the years, and finally explode in the fury of the Revolutionary trial at which the Widow Capet, as she was called, was finally condemned to death.

During those early days of summer, 1774, the great guilds and corporate bodies of the State all made their way to La Muette in succession to pay their respects to the new king and queen: after the Court itself, the Chambre des Comptes and the Cour des Monnaies arrived, followed by the great procession of the university community and the members of the French Academy. The marshals of the city of Paris made the trip to La Muette in procession from the Hôtel de Ville, followed by the judiciary and law professions. For a few brilliant weeks of summer in that most promising year of 1774, La Muette was transformed into a mini-Versailles where the new monarchs conducted themselves as upper-middle class First Citizens – orchestra leaders in what could have become a new social order and new social contract with the nation.

At last, in an inverted form of what was to come in 1789, the king and queen received the merchant classes of Paris, and the market women who worked in the great Halles. When asked whether he really wanted to receive these lowest of classes in the kingdom in a constituted corps, the king responded: "I want it – yes, in fact I order it – to be done. This part of the people pleases me and besides, commerce is what makes nations rich."

It was from La Muette that Louis XVI issued his the first and perhaps most generous decree. By this decree, the king renounced the "Privilege of the Happy Accession to the Throne" ("le Don de joyeux avènement") and the "Privilege of the Queen's Belt" ("le Don de ceinture"). These were in fact two important fiscal measures that the Crown renounced

on the day of accession to power. Only Louis XII had made a similar move two centuries before. The first of these two decrees confirmed the acquired immunities and tax-free status of certain towns and communes throughout France, as well as for certain corporations and recently ennobled persons. The second measure exempted wine merchants from a tax which was destined to provide the queen's household with income. At the time, these two measures would have produced about 41 million pounds, a considerable sum in light of the desperate situation of the royal treasury in 1774. Marie-Antoinette, in a letter to her sister Marie-Christine, remarked that she thought the royal couple, by this generous act, would "make ourselves loved by the people". This Edict was one of the most popular acts of Louis XVI, and was even cited in his defence during his trial; the text was illustrated with an engraving and sold throughout the kingdom.

Other more important measures of economy were also decided at La Muette. The king ordered that the coin of the realm – which was usually re-cast with the image of the new king, allowing the treasury to diminish the precious metal content of the new coins – be kept in circulation and replaced only gradually. At the same time, the extravagant life of the Court was reduced considerably; Louis ordered that the numerous parties and balls be eliminated, and that the daily life of the royal family conform to the norms of upper-middle class families, eating and socialising in the same rooms. This was all a far cry from Versailles, where the minute ritual of the Court enforced the aura of royal authority.

The gates to the Bois de Boulogne were also opened to the public, even when the king was in residence at La Muette; this in fact began the tradition of the Bois as a public park, even though the hunt was

forbidden to all except the royal entourage. The king and queen often went into the woods on official promenades accompanied by a curious public, eager for first-hand news of the Court.

Every year the king returned to La Muette during the months of April and May, when he assisted at a review of the Swiss guards in the nearby Sablons Plains. Distinguished visitors also made their way to the château: the Emperor Joseph II of Austria, the brother of Marie-Antoinette, came for a stay in May 1777.

And others sought out the king at La Muette. An apothecary by the name of Parmentier came to see the king to ask for some sandy ground for a new plant he had received from the colonies. The king granted some land in the nearby woods, and the first crops of potatoes sprouted the next season in the forest. "Hachis Parmentier" was soon to be added to the French menu.

By 1780 the Court was rarely to be seen at La Muette. The queen came on several occasions, alone or with her ladies-in-waiting to enjoy the gardens of the château. But life was beginning to ebb out of the château, as it was no longer the theatre for the multiple acts of royal daily life. Records in the National Archives indicate that the Court continued to pay the large upkeep costs of the château and grounds during the first years of the 1780s, but no further large-scale improvements were made.

Interlude: the Enlightenment comes to La Muette

The year was 1783, and in the midst of financial crisis, the Parisian élite were tinkering as ever with the new ideas in the air. The salons did not diminish their

activities, nor did the Court take any less interest in the new sciences that were being practised by the amateur. Two gentlemen used La Muette as the stage of one of the most daring exploits of the century. The Marquis d'Arlandes and the physicist Pilâtre de Rosier had long been experimenting with lighter-than-air machines, in the form of large balloons. These engines were spherical in form and made of canvas which was covered with colourful paper décor. An opening in the bottom of the balloon was attached to a straw basket with a small brazier that created the necessary heat to make the balloon rise. The two scientists decided to attempt a manned flight over the city of Paris. They chose the upper part of the Muette gardens for their take-off. Assembled for the occasion were the curious and the fervent, the learned and the sophisticated. Benjamin Franklin, himself interested in atmospheric questions, was among those who witnessed the launch.

The balloon was designed and assembled in the famous Revillion wallpaper factory in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. It was carried to La Muette, where a special launch pad had been assembled not far from the present Place de Colombie. A selected public was admitted to the gardens for the occasion; the account left by d'Arlandes captures something of the excitement of the moment:

> "I was surprised by the silence that our take-off created among the crowds at La Muette. As we ascended, I thought that the public was in need of some sign from us, as they were frightened and surprised. Having taken my handkerchief, I waved it to the crowds, and I saw a great movement in the gardens of La Muette. It was at that moment precisely that M. Pilâtre said to me, 'You're not doing anything! Put more straw on the fire…' I did so, bending down to put some straw in. When I looked back at the garden, I could no

> longer see La Muette. Surprised, I looked towards the west. I was astounded that I could see as far as the Oise river. I saw Conflans, Poissy, Saint-Germain, Saint-Denis, Sèvres! I realised that we were still in Passy or at Chaillot. I looked down through the floor of the basket which carried us, and I saw under us the Visitation Convent of Chaillot. M. Pilâtre said to me 'There is the Seine, and we are falling! More straw!' We went to work. But instead of crossing the river, as we were heading towards the Invalides, we followed the Island of Swans in the middle of the Seine, and headed over Paris."[33]

The machine reached a height of about 100 meters in the air, although there were moments during the flight when the dauntless navigators nearly dropped through the roof of unsuspecting citizens. The two aeronauts crash-landed outside the city walls on the Butte des Cailles in the present 13th *arrondissement* of Paris, not far from the Gobelins. They were greeted with a large crowd of spectators who had followed the flight over the city of Paris, and enthusiastically met the air travellers with cheers and shouts. The first manned flight had taken place.

In another vein, the great botanist and naturalist Buffon was also an *habitué* of the salons of La Muette. He was particularly interested in repeating the experiments of Archimedes. The Greek scientist was reported to have used mirrors to concentrate rays of the sun on the enemy fleet besieging the city of Syracuse. The ships burst into flames, reversing the fortunes of the besieged. Buffon installed large lenses on the roof of the Château de la Muette, and began focusing them on far-off dwellings of peasants. Many of them went up in flames, sacrifices to the new science. Buffon is reported to have paid four times

the value of the houses, but there is no record of whether he warned people of their impending fate. Such cavalier acts may have added to the rancour of the poor in those last years before the Revolution.

The so-called "system" of cotton spinning, a primitive form of textile-weaving equipment, was brought over from England by the engineer Milne. He left a copy of the machine in the Cabinet des Machines de Vaucanson (a copyright act of sorts), and was granted ample space at La Muette to set up his machines for demonstration to the entrepreneurs of the time; thus, La Muette briefly became a pavilion for technical inventions.

The last days of the old La Muette

The Court used the château infrequently in the 1780s. The correspondence of Marie-Antoinette records that she was sometimes a visitor at La Muette, but none of the great Court functions were ever held again at the château. In one of the last mentions of La Muette in her letters during 1786, Marie-Antoinette recalls that she had summoned the famous miniaturist painter Sicardi to La Muette to paint her portrait; it was later sent to her sister, the Duchess of Parma as a present and a memento.

The financial crisis of the monarchy was the ruin of La Muette. In 1787, the king decided to purchase the Château of Saint-Cloud; an exchange was proposed with the Duke of Orléans, swapping Saint-Cloud for the Châteaux of Choisy and La Muette, with a small forest thrown into the bargain. This plan was never realised, due in part to the wrangling of the Duke of Orléans, the future Philippe Égalité. But it was clear that the usefulness of La Muette to the monarchy had reached its end.

Elsewhere, the Crown was being pressured to reduce greatly the expenditures throughout the kingdom. La Muette and the neighbouring Château de Madrid, already much run-down, were both put up for sale or demolition at the death of the last Governor of La Muette, the Marquis of Soubise-Rohan (July 1787). A Royal Ordinance of August 1787 put La Muette on the auction block "for reasons of economy".[34] There were no buyers for the property, and little was done to maintain the buildings or the gardens in the next three years. Gradually, La Muette fell into disuse, its gardens overgrown with weeds. The building was stripped of its mirrors and woodwork – expensive portable furnishings – as well as all the works of art. The end was near.

2

Chapter V

The Revolution

The National Assembly voted the sale of La Muette in May 1790, hoping to attract new buyers. La Muette lay abandoned, the king a semi-recluse in Versailles and, later, Paris. On the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, on 14 July 1790, the city of Paris offered a great banquet in the gardens of La Muette. Fifteen thousand federal soldiers from throughout the kingdom were invited to this massive feast. Great tables were set up and dancing platforms installed in the former gardens of the king. So much food was ordered that it was found necessary – and perhaps expedient, given the famine in the city – to open the festivities to all the needy people of Paris who could make their way to the château grounds. Some 6 000 converged on La Muette, adding to the noise and merrymaking of the soldiers. General La Fayette appeared at one point during the day, mounted on a white horse; he delivered such a speech that the public broke into a riot, almost suffocating the horse – a foretaste of things to come.

As the house was more or less abandoned during this time, it can be assumed that the uncontrolled crowd of nearly 20 000 people in the former deer park caused serious damage to the property, including the house.

The title of the property was transferred to the municipality of Paris. Although stripped of its former finery, the basic structure of the building was still in

good condition, and the city continued to try to sell the entire property. But conditions were not favourable for a quick sell. Numerous properties which had been confiscated from religious orders, the Church and assorted nobles were flooding the market. Prices were ridiculously low for these vast estates,[35] and there were few buyers. Most potential buyers were middle-class entrepreneurs looking for cheap building materials rather than some new stately manor to live in. Such ostentatious behaviour would have been dangerous; it would also have been uneconomical at a time when there was a high demand for housing in the capital.

The small commune of Passy tried to buy the property in May 1791, but could not raise the funds. It was decided that the sale would be easier if the property were divided. A first portion of the garden was sold off in late 1791.

The Bois de Boulogne, as a royal domain, also became the property of the state. It too was being damaged rapidly by the hordes of people who were stripping trees for firewood and killing all the game that came within their sights. The city of Paris was charged by the government to protect the forest; La Fayette established a guard of 16 soldiers at La Muette, in the old Swiss guard pavilion. There they camped for several months, until they moved to one of the outbuildings nearer the forest. The former Concierge of La Muette, Rosalie Filleul, remained in the château until 1793, when she was finally arrested and guillotined for complicity with "la Messaline Antoinette".[36]

On 2 July 1792 the district Directory of Saint-Denis registered the adjudication of La Muette. In the main lot was the château, which was described as having a basement with kitchens and service rooms, a ground

floor, and a second floor crowned by a third floor which had a mansard roof. A second building containing smaller apartments was located to the right of the château. Included was the entire garden closed in by a wall, and a large ditch-like moat which encircled the property. The front gate was closed by an iron grill. The property was sold to a Boiscressy, who divided it into four equal parcels. By 1793, Charles-Cécile-Omer Lavy, a former secretary of the king, had acquired three-fourths of the former property through purchases and exchanges. Lavy therefore had the château with most of its commons and the vast majority of the gardens; the other fourth belonged to a mysterious Monsieur Châtelet, an artist from Paris. In his fourth of the property were the Orangerie, the Swiss guard pavilion, the vegetable garden, the dairy and the pump house. The property changed hands several times again between 1795 and 1798; each time the sale involved dividing some of the lots.

It may appear strange that a property would literally be split down the middle – right down to the middle of the house – to make it more attractive to a buyer. But it must be remembered what these times were like: political and social turmoil; rampant inflation with the introduction of the "assignats", the paper currency of the new regime; a great need for new building materials; and a market glutted with ancient edifices without the economic structures there to maintain them through a system of rents. It would have been important to try to interest a buyer in a plot of land with some habitable structure upon it, either to be used as a quarry for materials or a lodging for residents. It was therefore necessary that each parcel of land have part of the château. The solution was to cut it down in the middle and make two buildings out of what had previously been a single, vast edifice. Little concern was given to the vandalism this encouraged.

The main building of the château was cut in half; the left and right wings were made into separate buildings by the demolition of the central wing. A small open-air passage thus replaced the front entry hall and central salon, totally separating the two buildings. The right wing, that closest to Passy, had four windows and a small side garden. It was thus called "La Petite Muette"; the left side, with five windows and a more spacious garden, retained the name "La Muette".

"La Petite Muette" passed through several hands. In 1804, it was sold to the famous survivor of the Troubled Times, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, where he installed himself and his small Court during the heady days of the Empire. The affair of the Duke d'Enghien had just concluded with the death of Enghien. Talleyrand had orchestrated the kidnapping of the prince, but had opposed the killing, more out of fear of bolstering Napoleon's power than out of any moral scruples. Perhaps the walls of the Petite Muette really did hear the famous judgement attributed to Talleyrand about the murder of Enghien: *"C'est pire qu'un crime; c'est une faute!"* (It's worse than a crime; it's a mistake!) At La Petite Muette Talleyrand received the rich and famous of his time, including the sensitive and brilliant Mme Récamier. In 1811 it was sold to the Emperor, although Talleyrand continued to live there. At the Restoration, La Petite Muette was taken back by the Crown and placed on the Civil List; the Comte Corvetto, Minister of State for Louis XVIII, lived there for several years. It was taken off the Civil List in 1832, and passed again through several hands until it was purchased for the newly formed Auteuil Railroad, which was charting a passage through the western section of Paris.

The larger building at La Muette remained uninhabited throughout the period of the Empire.

The building fell into ever greater disrepair, and the gardens were totally overrun with growth.
A serious investment would be required to restore La Muette to any semblance of its former grandeur.

2

Chapter VI

The 19th Century

The fate of La Muette followed that of the monarchy. A futile attempt would be made to restore the old ways, but it would soon become apparent that the only future lay in espousing the middle-class values and sentiments that were to mark the new age.

One such bourgeois in Paris during the late Empire was Sebastian Érard, a native of Strasbourg. Born under the *ancien régime* in 1752, Érard had actually come to La Muette and, according to his own memoirs, was noticed loitering outside the château one Sunday. His Germanic accent paved the way to a meeting with the queen, who instructed the Swiss guards to let him through the gates to visit the splendid gardens of La Muette. Érard could hardly have dreamed at that point that he would one day inhabit part of that property.

Sebastian Érard was very much a man of the Enlightenment. Born into a family of furniture-makers, he became interested at an early age in drawing and design, constantly attracted by the possibility of inventing new machines and work-saving devices. Sebastian moved to Paris at the young age of sixteen, seeking employment and a profession. He became an apprentice to a harpsichord- and piano-maker in the capital. Quickly he distinguished himself by inventing

a complicated harpsichord mechanism that was the wonder of Paris. The Duchess of Villeroy, a great music lover, employed him to create ever more perfect musical instruments for her personal use.

But it was in the domain of pianos that Érard was to make his name and his fortune. In the late 18th century the best instruments came from England or the German principalities, and their cost in France was prohibitive; few could afford the luxury of ownership. Érard began by making a prototype of a pianoforte for the Duchess of Villeroy; it was such a success that more orders came in from admiring friends of the Duchess, including many of the newly wealthy merchants and professionals in Paris. Érard brought his brother to Paris and moved to a comfortable atelier in the Rue de Lille, where he began mass production of pianos to keep up with the French public's ever-increasing demand. Foreign imports dropped dramatically, as the domestic market's appetite for ever-cheaper pianos grew. Soon composers and musical arrangers were writing or transcribing music for pianos. By the middle of the 19th century, the piano would become the indispensable musical device in the home of every self-respecting bourgeois in Europe. One of the greatest vogues of the 19th century would be music composed for home-played pianos, in forms to match the new domestic needs of the middle class; the new stay-at-home culture required a new musical instrument capable of great virtuosity. Sebastian Érard was the father of this technical revolution, and like so many others of his time, a man between two centuries, two eras, two different cultures.

This change was not accomplished without difficulty. The monopoly on piano imports belonged to the lute-makers' union, and they appealed

to the king to prevent Érard from developing a domestic product that would threaten their trade with German and English pianoforte-makers. Louis XVI reviewed the case in 1785 and decided in favour of Érard, ordering that Érard be "permitted to make and sell pianofortes, without being hindered or troubled by anyone, for any reason or cause".

Érard made a special piano for Marie-Antoinette to work with her voice, which could not carry far. He rehearsed the piano with her in the old château. Later, he turned his talents to perfecting mechanisms for the harp, an instrument that was then very much in vogue, particularly in the aristocratic salons of Paris. He received little encouragement for his work, and lacked the necessary capital to invest in full-time research into better musical instruments. As a result, he decided to move to London in 1786 – indeed a fortunate move for him.

When the Revolution broke out in 1789, Érard was still in London; the Paris firm was being managed by his brother, who had no connections with the Court. Sebastian quickly realised the dangers of returning, and he sat out the storm in England. He returned to Paris on the 9th of Thermidor (1793), bringing with him the technology for the grand piano which had been developed in England. He further perfected the piano by simplifying the harp movements of the grand piano. His piano manufacture moved to larger quarters, and became one of the most successful houses in all of Europe, exporting instruments to the Far East and the Americas.[37] The Napoleonic wars caused serious setbacks to international trade, but Érard had already ensured that his London branch would function independently, headed by his nephew Pierre. In 1815, at the very end of the Empire, he presented his inventions to the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Beaux-Arts for judgement:

the praise was resounding for the contributions to the "progress of art and science" .

In 1820, Sebastian Érard, who had been living in Sèvres, began looking for lodgings closer to Paris. The former royal domain of La Muette was divided, as we have said, into two separate properties, both containing one pavilion of the old château. The largest was La Muette, which Érard acquired in 1820; it was not until 1852 that the Érard family purchased the second pavilion, La Petite Muette, thus reuniting the two wings of the old château once again.

In 1820, La Muette included about 11.5 hectares of land and the larger section of the old château; the latter included a two-storey building with entry, salon, dining room and billiard room on the ground floor, all facing the garden, and a variety of bedrooms and service rooms upstairs. However, before making an offer on the property, Érard had to overcome certain scruples. Perhaps because of his royalist leanings and sympathies, he petitioned the king to ensure that it was the royal will that the property be sold off to a bourgeois such as himself. When he received word from the Court that the king raised no objections, he promptly bought the property and added the royal missive to the titles and deeds of the property itself.

Érard, who was not married, moved to La Muette with his brother and his three sisters. To house this extended family, he had another story added to the two-storey structure he had bought. On the roof, he had a terrace built to enjoy the views of Paris and the forest nearby. Érard also was a collector of paintings, and decided that he needed more room for his growing collection. To this end, he had a one-storey gallery built to the north of the main building, where he could hang his collection.

Érard began to restore the reputation of La Muette to its former glory. Gallant dinner parties, great balls and dances were organised; he invited the most famous literary and artistic people of his time to come and to revel with him in his truncated château; these included many well-known foreign guests who made La Muette an international meeting place for writers and musicians. Honours were showered upon him by the Academies of Science and Music in Paris and abroad.

Gradually, Érard grew more distant from the world in which he had made his fortune. His brother, the master craftsman of his inventions, died in 1826; Sebastian became more hermetic in his dealings with the outside world, and the great days of La Muette seemed to be at an end. He died in August 1831 at the advanced age of 80. He left his entire fortune, including La Muette, to his nephew Pierre, the man who had directed his firm in London for the past sixteen years.

It is worth pausing for a moment to mention the career of Sebastian Érard the collector of paintings. At his death in 1831, Érard left a collection of some 259 canvasses, all of which hung in the rooms and gallery of La Muette. These paintings formed the backdrop to the many soirées, dinners, balls and parties that Érard organised over the ten years he lived there. At his death, the painting collection was one of the most important in Europe still in private hands. Érard had profited from the upheavals of the Revolution, and the spoil-taking of the early Empire to acquire a sizeable collection of art work. Shortly before his death he published a catalogue of his holdings. Among the painters whose works hung at La Muette, Érard counted Caravaggio, Bassano, Bellini, Bronzino, A. Carrachi, L. Carrachi, P. de Champaigne, P. da Cortone, Andrea Del Sarto, Dominiquino, Dughet, Albert Dürer, Garfalo, Claude le Lorrain,

Ghirlandaio, Giordano, Guercino, Guilio Romano, Greuze, Guido Reni, Hobbema, Metzu, Murillo, Palma Il Vecchio, Parmigianino, Perugino, Poussin, Raphaël, Rembrandt, Rubens, Ruysdael, Rosa, Sebastiano del Piombo, Steen, Teniers, Van Dyck, Velasquez, Veronese and de Witte. The pride of the collection were the three Raphaël (*The Virgin and the Angels*, *The Burial of Christ*, and *The Miracle*), the ten Rembrandts, the two Dürer and the 13 Teniers.

The sale of the painting collection went poorly. Market conditions were bad; the impact of the recent revolution of 1830 was still being felt through social and political unrest. Riots took place at regular intervals, and business was sluggish everywhere. Pierre Érard eventually sold off most of the collection to galleries and private collectors at a loss. He sent some of the collection to London, where better market conditions prevailed. By the end of 1831, the entire collection was gone from La Muette. Due to the financial difficulties involved in reorganising the piano business, Pierre Érard was obliged to rent La Muette for a short time to a Doctor Guérin, who turned the pavilion into an orthopaedic hospital from 1831 until 1838.

Pierre Érard married a distant relation in 1838, and at the lapse of the rental agreement with the orthopaedic doctor, he once again took possession of La Muette. He moved in with his three spinster aunts as well as his wife and his sister and brother-in-law. The latter, Gaspare Spontini, was a talented musician who had studied with Cimarosa, Piccinni and Paesiello in Naples many years before. The fortunes of La Muette were to move under the aegis of Melpomene, the Muse of Music.

Spontini completed the musical triptych at La Muette: the music-maker (Érard), the singer (Mme Érard),

and now the composer himself. The Italian Spontini was well known. He had six operas to his name before he left the Conservatory of Music in Naples in 1798 (*I Puntigli delle donne, L'Eroismo ridicolo, Il Teseo riconosciuto, LAmore segreto, Gli amanti in cimento, Il Finito pittore, Chi piu garda non vede, L'Isola desabitata*). He followed these with two comic operas (*La fuga in maschera, Finata filosofa*) in 1799. Spontini fled Naples when the Bourbons were driven out, and decided to come to France.

Upon his arrival in Paris, the Italian Theatre of Favart opened his *Finata filosofa*, to the same rave reviews that greeted the Naples première. The Empress Josephine was present on the first night and was so taken with the music and the light-hearted approach to drama that she had Spontini named Court Composer and Court Music Master. He continued to produce operas at a brisk pace. In 1805, however, a cabal of theatergoers – that dreadnought of the 19th century – hissed his *La Petite Maison* off the stage, demanding that the foreigner be fired! Somewhat shaken, Spontini continued to compose for the Court. In 1806, he presented his *La Vestale* to the Empress, who in turn sent it to the Academy for judgement. The clique at the Academy refused to authorise the production, on the grounds that it was too "foreign, and new" for the dignified stages of Paris. Josephine turned to her husband, who ordered that the opera be rehearsed in the Tuileries; Spontini was in ecstasy. Without further ado, the piece was opened at the Opéra on 15 December 1807. The author saw the triumph of his music with three hundred performances in Paris alone. His work was celebrated from Naples to Berlin as a new sound in music. He went on to greater heights: Napoleon ordered two new operas, *Orestes* and *Fernand Cortez*. The latter opened in 1809, accompanied by a declaration of war against Spain. Both operas were triumphs.

These achievements qualified him for an imperial favour. When the post of Director of the Italian Opera of Paris became vacant in 1810, Spontini was named to the job. A year later he married the sister of Pierre Érard. He spent the following few years in Paris, where he composed numerous operas.

Later, Spontini left Paris to accept the invitation of Frederick-William III of Prussia. In Germany, his reputation was at its zenith; Weber, that man of both centuries, declared that *Olympie* was the work of a great composer. For twenty years, Spontini and his wife lived in Berlin, where he carried out the duties of *Kappelmeister* and Director of the Berlin Opera. It was there that Châteaubriand met him and his quiet wife at one of the numerous state dinners of the time. He was elected to the *Institut* in the section of musical composition as a Corresponding Member. In 1840 he left Berlin and returned to live in Paris with his wife; they set up house at La Muette.

The château was to see a great number of the famous musicians of the 19th century come to its salons; the parties continued with great *élan*. Auber, Halévy, Pradier, Adam, Ingres and Horace Vernet all came to La Muette to discuss music, and occasionally display their talents to a limited audience of musical amateurs. Liszt and Thalberg were among those who played on the Érard pianos at La Muette, accompanied by the famous singers of the day such as La Grisi, Lablance, l'Alboni and La Frezzolini. Richard Wagner came to La Muette in 1849, giving piano recitals. When Spontini died in 1851 during a trip to Italy, the lights at La Muette began to grow dim.

Pierre Érard continued to produce quality pianos. He won the coveted Council Medal at the Universal Exposition of London in 1851, and the fame and fortune of the Érard family has now to be counted

among the great industrial fortunes of the age – pianos were considered manufactured goods.

In 1852 Pierre Érard launched a plan to put back together much of the old domain of La Muette. He started by purchasing a little house that had been built on a small lot of the royal domain sold off under the Empire. Next, he set his sights on acquiring the second large segment of the property, the so-called Petite Muette. However, another industrial entrepreneur, A. Péreire, had his eyes on the same property. Péreire had begun the building of a circular railroad around the city of Paris; he was acquiring land in the area of La Muette to link the Auteuil station to the Chaussée de la Muette. More of a businessman than Érard, he "scooped" the sale of La Petite Muette, parcelled out enough land for his railroad at the edge of the property, and then resold the remaining land and truncated château (La Petite Muette) to Érard – at the same price he had just paid for the whole of the property. Before he died in 1855, Pierre Érard witnessed the reuniting of the two properties that had been sold off separately decades before. However, it was to be some time before the two halves of the château itself would be reunited in a single building.

With the death of Pierre Érard, the family business passed to his elderly wife. Unable to manage the estate and the business herself, she called for her brother-in-law, Schaeffer, to come from Strasbourg to manage the firm. They built a smaller house on the property, on the Rue du Mail, where they began spending the winter months. La Muette was reserved for the summer. The harp manufacturing operation, which had also been on the property, was moved to the outlying district of La Villette. The social life of La Muette began again in earnest; both the literati and the musical glitterati of Europe came to visit

Érard's widow. During this time, she continued to purchase medium-sized properties in the neighbourhood of La Muette, adding them to the now sizeable estate.

In 1864, the niece of Mme Érard (she was later to become her heir and adopted child), Mlle Schaeffer, married the Count de Franqueville. At the same time, the rental agreement for La Petite Muette, which had been purchased in 1853 with a sitting tenant – the Count d'Auchamp – expired. When d'Auchamp left La Petite Muette, Mme Érard began large-scale remodelling of the property. The two gardens were integrated into a single property and laid out in a single pattern. The difficulties were immense. One half of the building had four storeys (La Muette), whereas the other half had but two (La Petite Muette). Serious renovation work would have to wait for two more decades. In the meantime, Mme Érard maintained two separate parts of La Muette; while she lived in the larger half, the Count and Countess de Franqueville lived in the smaller part of the new château, which included the bedroom of Marie-Antoinette on the first floor.

Mme Érard recreated the glorious days of the 1830s and the 1840s when every important musician in Europe came to the château to play, sing or recite to a captive audience of bourgeois amateurs. These included Berlioz, Félicien David, Gounod, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Massenet, Léo Delibes, and Guiraud. Mme Érard was by now a friend and admirer of Richard Wagner; during one of his visits, he presented her with the score of his opera *Tannhauser*, which he dedicated to her. As the piano was the very source of the Érard fortune, it was natural that the greatest pianists of the time should make a pilgrimage to the château. The *soirées musicales* treated listeners to fresh performances by Listz and Thalenberg, as well as Rubinstein. Singers

and soloists also were to be seen, including the famous Mme Krauss and Mme Miolan-Carvalho.

In the late 1860s La Muette was incorporated into the new 16th *arrondissement* of Paris, as were other "suburbs" of the city. The two parts of the old château needed repairs. In June 1870, Mme Érard moved the entire family out of the buildings, and prepared for an important remodelling job. The upper storeys needed consolidation work, as the floors were beginning to sag. Workers were called in, and the two houses were abandoned to the rejuvenating forces of artisans and dayworkers.

The situation did not last long, however. In the summer of 1870, war broke out between France and Prussia. The city of Paris was soon surrounded by the Prussian army, and the outlying districts near the city fortifications were seized by the French army as military command posts. La Muette was perfectly placed on the west side of the city for such a military establishment. Vice-Admiral Fleuriot de Lange, the Commander of the XIth section of the city forces, took up residence in the abandoned château; he had an observation tower built on the roof of La Muette, and an earthwork wall built along the terrace steps facing the forest side. The garden and park of the château were completely ravaged, dug up and transformed into a bivouac for the sentries and small armed forces stationed there. The formal garden, the vegetable garden and the hedge garden were all neglected and fell back into their natural state. La Muette survived the siege of Paris with only minor damage to the buildings – the platform on top of the west section of the building burned down, but that did not harm the main part of the château itself.

The Franco-Prussian war was protracted by a more sinister upheaval. When the legitimate government

of France surrendered to the Prussian forces, the more radical, populist forces within the city of Paris declared the peace shameful; they quickly elected their own government, based upon a mixture of medieval "city state" governments and the potent image of the Revolution of 1789. The French legitimists, now aided by the Germans, found themselves outside the city walls trying to get back in. A civil war broke out. The Commune, as the government of Paris during the Autumn of 1870 until the Spring of 1871 was called, was a calamity for the city of Paris. Monuments and buildings, cultural relics and gardens were systematically destroyed as the city was starved, shelled and bombarded by the Versailles government. Vice-Admiral Fleuriot had fled, leaving La Muette to the more colourful "General" Dombrowski, a worker-general who spent more time having fun than defending the western approaches of Paris. Dombrowski and his little band of ruffian soldiers spent the nine months of the Commune in hostile territory – the 16th *arrondissement* – where they occasionally shot at nearby "bourgeois" who ventured out into the streets. La Muette became the western city headquarters of the republican, ragtag army of the Commune.

In May of 1871, Louis Adolphe Thiers, the executive of the French government located in Versailles took charge of recapturing Paris from the Commune leaders. The city was well protected by the outer walls, and a series of fortified gates. Thiers surveyed the situation from the top of Mont-Valérien on the west of the city, and it was decided that the best chance to penetrate the city walls was a concentrated attack on one of the weaker fortified areas. Thiers chose to concentrate fire power on La Muette.

The selected target was a large military barracks situated along the wall of the city, close to the château. From the

heights of Mont-Valérien, artillery fire was directed towards the sector. The barracks was demolished as a result; miraculously, only one large shell fell in the château's park, effecting relatively little damage. While this well-thought-out stratagem was being executed, a single Versailles soldier near the Porte de Saint-Cloud noticed that there were no significant forces along the Saint-Cloud wall, and took the initiative to signal to the 27th Battalion nearby; they breached the wall, planting the French flag high on the wall after scaling it. Paris was on the verge of being delivered!

In the afternoon of 22 May, Passy was retaken, including the property of La Muette. Those Communards caught with arms in the neighbourhood of La Muette were taken to the wall of the city nursery near the château and promptly shot dead in what was to become the vengeful reconquest of Paris by the army. During the "bloody week" of 22-28 May 1871, between 20 000 and 30 000 insurrectionists were killed, as well as some 750 government troops. Much of Paris lay in ruins by the end of June.

La Muette would never recover from that blow. Jules Janin, a fashionable drama critic of the time and member of the French Academy, sighed with grief and wrote a stirring panegyric:

> "Dear and hospitable dwelling! We came there so often, in those glorious days, to take in the setting sun from the terrace, in admiration of the elegant gardens and flora provided by the Divine Maker! At the same time, in the salon of the château, Listz or Thalberg, in a series of remarkable fantasies, played for us one day *Don Juan*, on another *La Vestale*, or *Fernand Cortez* – all magisterial works of Spontini, the inspired son of La Muette. Spontini gave inspiration to Meyerbeer, after having received it himself from Gluck, all in that wondrous place.

> Thalberg made La Muette his second home. He only left it to go to his villa at Pausilippe. Pierre Érard loved Listz as his own son. It was like that at La Muette, that home of Mme Érard, in its green setting, the rendezvous of the most marvellous and creative of minds!"

During the next ten years, La Muette was home to the ageing Mme Érard, and the music ceased to play as her hearing became defective and her end approached. During the wave of secularisations that the French government ordered in the 1880s, Mme Érard gave refuge to numerous prelates and clergy who had been expropriated from their convents and colleges in Paris. It was during this period that a small chapel was created in one of the ground floor salons.

In 1889, Mme Érard died without direct issue. At her death, the property passed to her adopted niece and her husband, the Count and Countess de Franqueville. The new owners decided to rebuild the two separate parts of the château into a single dwelling. The additions of Sebastian Érard, including the extra storeys that had been added to one of the surviving wings, were removed, and a new central segment was constructed to connect the two orphaned wings of the 18th century building. The new structure resembled the old 18th century La Muette as it appeared before the Revolution. The renovations were not sturdy, however, and the château itself was in constant need of repair over the years.

Franqueville took an active part in the reconstruction of the château, as he indicates in his *Souvenirs*:

> "The château at La Muette had been cut into two parts at the Revolution. One of the two remaining buildings had an additional storey added to it, giving the whole a rather ugly appearance. I found the original architectural

drawings of Gabriel from 1745, and I sought to make the new château look as much like the old as possible. It was not until 1890, however, that I was able to move my library in and declare work over."

He left a concise description of this transformation in his recall of the move to La Muette:

"The lease on our apartment in the Faubourg Saint-Germain came to an end, and as we had not yet finished our new home, Mme Érard invited us to La Petite Muette, in the part of the château called La Muette. We took up residence in the second floor apartment. Thus I was able to supervise the work on our new home – that is, the construction that would bring together the two parts of the château. Our space on the second floor had once been the bedroom and attendant rooms of Marie-Antoinette… Many times, when I was a young man, I used to pass by La Muette and look into the wonderful park through the gate of the château. Those long, solitary avenues of trees, the round point at the top of the garden near the fortifications of the city, all cast a spell over me. I did not then know the name of the owner of the château; and today I find myself installed here as the new owner of that once mysterious dwelling. As the château was now restored, we decided to make it our main residence, and to leave the centre of Paris. At the time, transportation to Paris was not good, comprising an inadequate omnibus drawn by two horses, leaving every forty-five minutes from the Palais-Royal, and the Auteuil railroad from Saint-Lazare which passed by every half-hour."[38]

The ambience at La Muette changed to reflect the habits and preoccupations of its new owners. The

Count Amable-Charles de Franqueville (1840-1920) and his wife were resolute aristocrats. Aside from publishing some 20 books as well as articles on political science and more technical subjects such as railroads – his father had been Inspector General of the Railroads – Franqueville was a confirmed humanist who was a member of Moral Science Academy and President of the Institut de France during his long career. The château now became the haunt of the conservative, royalist literati and *beau monde* of the time; the names of those cherished invitees would mean nothing to us today, but they constituted much of the *seconde donne* elite of the time. Franqueville took his duties at the Academy seriously, and often held meetings of that august body in the château.

In late 1895, the city of Paris decided to sell the municipal nursery, which had once been part of the château park but was sold off at the Revolution. The mayor had ambitious ideas to develop the western part of the 16th *arrondissement*, and virgin land was needed to construct the much-desired bourgeois apartments that were the rage at the time. The middle classes were getting more wealthy and seeking appropriate housing far from the sluggish air of the city, which was fuelled each day by belching coal heating or wood-burning chimneys. An agreement was reached with the Franqueville family to sell part of the La Muette estate that was used as a garden. The second dismemberment of the château property was about to begin, under the double pressure of urban expansion and possibly sagging finances of the Franqueville family. First the city built the Avenue Jules-Sandeau in 1893 along the railroad. In 1896, the Avenue Émile-Augier, Rue Octave-Feuillet and Rue Eugène-Labiche were carved out of property belonging to La Muette and the city of Paris. The large seven-storey apartment buildings we see today in these streets were constructed as new homes for the wealthy.

Gradually the property was reduced as parcels of land were sold off for development. The year 1904 saw the opening of the Rue Verdi, the Rue Ponsard, part of the Rue Albéric-Magnard and the Rue de Franqueville (with the stipulation that the portion of the street in the garden was *"non-aedificandi"*, a condition that prevailed until the 1940s); the Rue Édouard-Fournier was opened in 1905, and the Rue la Muette in 1908. The Chaussée de la Muette, which had been the principal access to the château, had been opened and paved by the city of Paris as early as 1863, but new streets began to cut into it from the former property of La Muette. (The old Château was located near the present Monaco Annex of the OECD.)

The property was shrinking visibly. Mme Franqueville (Schaeffer-Érard) died in 1906 from pneumonia, leaving behind a much diminished husband and six children, among them a daughter married to Jean Darcy, a wealthy member of Paris society and minor period author. It was the Darcy family that was to inherit some of the remnants of La Muette after World War I.

Amidst all this urban development, La Muette continued to thrive as a centre for intellectual activity. The newest vocation of La Muette was to be a place for meetings, both political and intellectual – a tradition that survived the old château itself.

In 1901, the Count de Franqueville acted upon an idea that had been gestating throughout the learned societies of the New and Old Worlds: the creation of an international body that would gather together the principal academies and learned societies of Europe. This new institution was to be called the International Association of Academies. Nineteen such bodies from fifteen nations gathered for a meeting in Paris in April 1901. Franqueville, as President of the Institute,

organised a sumptuous reception for the delegates at La Muette. The doors opened to dignitaries from the academies of Germany, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Bavaria, Belgium, Denmark, the United States, France, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Prussia, the Russian Empire, Saxony and Sweden. A special concert was organised for the meeting: fifteen pieces were played by the orchestra, each representing a different country present.[39] It was the beginning of international meetings at La Muette.

In 1906, another curious meeting took place. In that year the anticlerical laws were passed in France, separating the Church and the State. A campaign of mass expropriations followed, and the clergy found themselves facing a hostile government bent on ending the long tug-of-war between the two parties by rendering the Church poor. Franqueville offered hospitality to the ageing Cardinal Richard of Paris who convened a special assembly of the bishops of France at La Muette. This meeting discussed the consequences of the anticlerical laws, and generally commiserated over the fate which had befallen the Church. Ever faithful to the *ancien régime*, La Muette served one last time as the halfway house to a new world order that was dawning on France and Europe.

2

Chapter VII

The New Beginning

La Muette entered the 20th century dressed in the garb of the 18th and firmly anchored in the values of the 19th. Much of the garden property had been sold off for housing developments, but the old château, located near the Chaussée de la Muette, was still a beacon in the west of Paris. The Count de Franqueville continued to play the role of the Parisian intellectual, and La Muette was the scene of many gay parties in the first decade of the century. The war changed much of that gaiety. Franqueville helped organise the war effort, and offered La Muette as a haven for officers during the hostilities. As President of the *Institut*, he received Maréchal Pétain into that august body, with fanfare and enthusiasm. He remained interested in the affairs of the Church, and was instrumental in helping set up and run the Institut Catholique in Paris.

Through his wife, Mme Schaeffer-Érard, he had inherited La Muette. He married twice more and had five more children, each of whom was to receive part of La Muette when he died in 1919.

At his death, the property was further divided. The old château, now in serious need of repairs, stood close to the Italian Consulate on the Rue du Conseiller-Collignon. To split the inheritance equally, it was decided to sell off most of the remaining land, including the old château. For this purpose, a building

corporation was created by the heirs to organise the "development" of the old property of La Muette through the sale of land and construction of new apartment buildings.

One plan that aborted was to turn the old château into an art school. A piece appeared in the 9 August 1920 issue of the *New-York Tribune:* "An historic château – all hope is lost to make it into an art school".

> "The plan to establish an art school, which might have been one of the most beautiful in Paris, an exclusively American one at that, has just been shelved because of the obstinate behaviour of the owners of the château at La Muette.
> The plan to establish the school was put forward by Cornelius Vanderbilt, who offered 15 million francs to the heirs of the property, once the residence of Marie-Antoinette.
> The Count de Franqueville, who represented the eight descendants of Sebastian Érard, replied that he would accept no offer less than 20 million francs.
> Mr. Vanderbilt refused to raise his price, and both sides would not negotiate. They came back to the question, but the days passed, and Mr. Vanderbilt left Paris for Germany to be received by the German emperor at Marienbad.
> The deal was off, and it is probable that this magnificent château will fall into the hands of housing developers."

Indeed, such was to be the case. In 1920 the original château was sold and by 1926, the last stone of the old building, now falling down, had disappeared; new streets were opened in the neighbourhood: the Rue Maspero and Rue du Conseiller-Collignon, the Rue d'Andigné, and a new section of the

Rue Albéric-Magnard. New dwellings were constructed to fill the space that had once been the midsection of the park at La Muette. A new owner, in the form of a Rothschild Baron, became interested in a large part of the open garden that was for sale.

The Rothschild dynasty was founded by the German Meyer Amschel (1744-1812), whose five sons located banking services in five different capitals of Europe: Amschel in Frankfurt, Salomon in Vienna, Nathan in London, Karl in Naples and James (who established the Rothschild Bank in the Rue Lafitte) in Paris. The Baron Henri de Rothschild, the new owner of the gardens of La Muette, was a descendant of the English branch of the family. He was the only son of James Edward Rothschild (1844-1884). In 1895, he married Mathilde Weisweiller; they had three children: James, Nadine, and Philip.

Henri de Rothschild had grown up at the family property of Vaux-les-Cernay outside of Paris. He wrote a charming narrative of that unhappy youth called *The Novel of a Poor Young Man*; it was published at his newly established residence of La Muette, and the frontispiece bears that address. In 1920 Rothschild decided to build a new château in the style of an 18th-century mansion. After acquiring what remained of the gardens of La Muette, he opened a street across the small property to create access to his new home. He called the street "André-Pascal", a pen-name he used over the next decades.

Rothschild was a curious person. He had a yacht named Eros on which he cruised the seas, holding parties that remained memorable long afterwards. He took to writing boulevard comedies, and became a well-known playwright under his pen-name[40] (*La Caducée, Le Moine, Le Filleul, Le Grand Patron, Moi, je..., Une Vocation*, among many others).

Rothschild also dabbled in art criticism – writing a long essay on the works of Chardin – and even did some journalistic crime writing with his *Pranzini, The Crime of the Rue Montaigne*. La Muette had once again found a vocation for letters. The gazettes of the time speak of lavish parties held there, and the comings and goings of the most prominent political and social figures in Europe. Rothschild also established a printing-press address at La Muette, and many of his plays were produced by his own press. In 1924, there is a record of Rothschild putting on his one-act play *L'Affaire Juliette* in the Théâtre de la Muette, a special part of the first floor having been made into a theatre for the occasion!

In 1933, he wrote his *Cruise around my Memories (Croisière autour de mes souvenirs)*, a second story of his own childhood. Tyrannised by a dominant mother, Rothschild remained marked for life by this experience. The writer Colette wrote the preface of this charming work, in which she offered this portrait of Rothschild in the 1920s when he was writing for the theatre:

> "M. de Rothschild, you have just given me, to my great regret, but pleasing to my delayed taste for the fantastic, the strange but true story of a child held behind a golden fence, reaching out through the bars towards the real world outside Vaux-les-Cernay, with the empty hands of a little orphan."

She later saw him one night outside the Theatre de Pigalle, where many of his plays were put on (and which had been built for his own work):

> "It was in the Rue Pigalle, one cold and rainy night, that I saw the child of that fairy tale, standing on the sidewalk, beside a car which had stopped. His large, frizzy head of hair was inclined on the hand of an old lady – a white, despotic and wrinkled hand. And the grown

child kissed that hand with such fervour, so solemnly and in such an exemplary filial way that remembering that kiss, I began to doubt that your Hero, M. Rothschild, was ever really as ridiculous and unhappy as you made him out to be in your text."

Rothschild created a new La Muette from scratch. He planted a new park in front of the château and behind it, and enclosed the entire property with a grill. The top of the park bordered on the Place de la Colombie, where the Montgolfier episode had taken place. The château itself was decorated with fine oak panelling and carved doors from the Château de Montevillargel in the Oise. The latter had been a family property of Mme Rothschild. At the same time, wonderful 18th century furniture was specially chosen for the rooms. On the ground floor three large salons opened onto a central hall big enough to receive the crowds of visitors who came to dinners, balls, fêtes and parties at the château throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In the large salon were hung three large Gobelins tapestries designed by Claude Audran the Younger representing Jupiter, Diana and Saturn (five others are in the Élysée Palace today); Rothschild had his own coat of arms emblazoned over the front door of the château. Inside the château, the great collection of Rothschild antiques, paintings and rare objects were on display throughout.

Aside from his life as a playwright, literary figure and sometime glitterati, Rothschild was a well-known medical doctor, and published numerous child welfare studies and manuals on maternal care. This renaissance-type career was made possible by the fabulous wealth which he had at his disposal.

The rumours of war must surely have reached Rothschild from his many family relations around

Europe who were increasingly aware of the difficulties besetting the Jewish communities of Europe. Rothschild decided to close La Muette in 1939, before the outbreak of war. Looking for a haven in Europe, he moved with his family to Lausanne in Switzerland; they stayed there during the war. The château was seized by the occupying German forces, much as Rothschild had feared would happen. He bided his time, waiting to reclaim his property when the war ended.

At the beginning of the war, La Muette remained empty for several months. Later, when Paris was occupied by the German Army, the château was used as a centre for Naval Intelligence. There were rumours of nasty interrogations and comings-and-goings of important military personages, but little remains of that period. The basement kitchens and cellars were said to have been put to use for detention and interrogation of special prisoners.

With the liberation of Paris in 1944, the château was again left empty for some time. In late 1945, the United States Army took over the buildings to organise operations in the aftermath of the war. This was a temporary arrangement, as the building still legally belonged to Rothschild.

Rothschild died in 1947, without ever returning to La Muette. He left the property to his family, who set about selling the damaged château. It took them a year to find a buyer in the form of the newly created Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC). On 16 April 1948, the Governments of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the commanders of the French, British and American occupation forces in Germany signed the

Convention establishing the OEEC. The offices of the Organisation were moved from the Quai d'Orsay into the Château de la Muette in early 1949.

The OEEC was the centre for the activities of the Marshall Plan in Europe. The Château de la Muette housed the Organisation, until it began to be clear that the 200 staff members could no longer be accommodated in the château and the four-storey building facing it. The world too was changing.

In 1961, the OEEC transformed itself into a new international organisation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – the OECD. The United States and Canada formally joined, as did Germany. In the new era of co-operation, the former enemies joined together in the OECD to promote economic development and policy dialogue among the free world nations. Japan joined in 1964, followed by Australia, New Zealand and Finland; Mexico, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Korea followed in the 1990s, making it a truly international organisation.

The château was put to new uses with the OECD. At first the building housed many of the operations for the Organisation, but soon it became the headquarters for the senior staff and central administration. The great salon was transformed into a meeting room for the Council of Permanent Representatives to the OECD, the governing board.

The ten departments of the OECD grew over time to their present size of some 1 900 staff members. Most government activities were included in the activities of the OECD, which gained a name for its economic analysis and expertise around the world. The press in France speaks often of the "Experts of the Château de la Muette" when a new pronouncement is

made to the public about an important economic situation. Once a year, La Muette hosts the annual Ministerial meeting of the OECD at which Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Economics come together to discuss developments in the world.

Throughout the year, the OECD receives some 20 000 national civil servants who gather at La Muette to advance the dialogue among governments on important social, political and economic issues facing them. This permanent conference of governments is a fitting vocation for the Château de la Muette, where the past has witnessed innumerable discreet conversations and behind-closed-door activities.

Nothing remains today of the old Château de la Muette, and precious little remains of the old estate itself. In 1989, the last two parcels of land which had been part of the old La Muette were sold. For years, the two empty lots at the corner of the Rue de Franqueville and the Rue Albéric-Magnard, which had for so long offered hospitality to stray cats in the neighbourhood, lay vacant. The lots belonged to Mme Deutsch de la Meurthe, whose mansion, a three-story town house, faced them. The house was built in 1902 by the architect Hulot for the daughter of the Count de Franqueville. M. et Mme Deutsch de la Meurthe, who purchased it in 1920, were another prominent wealthy couple. The wife was the heiress to an oil fortune in France. During the 1920s and 1930s, the mansion once again saw the lively, delightful parties and dinners that were so much a part of the quiet residential area around La Muette. To ensure their own tranquillity, the Deutsch de la Meurthe also bought the two lots facing their mansion, and replanted trees. This gave them a view out of their windows of two small parks in front of their house. During the war, the couple fled France and went to Morocco, where they stayed until after the war.

Their house was occupied by a German officer and the street name was changed to Richard Wagner. After the war, the Deutsch de la Meurthe never returned to the house, and it remained closed and locked for almost forty years. It was only at the death of Mme Deutsch de la Meurthe that the house and property were sold to a development company, and the new apartments were constructed on the last free space of the old La Muette park outside of the OECD property.

Tomorrow the château may belong to another owner, and the history of La Muette will continue with a new vocation. One cannot be indifferent, however, to the forest creatures and urban ghosts that haunt this place, for elves and sprites, dwarves and trolls all once lived here – alongside kings and queens, villains and heroes, saints and sinners.

2

Notes

1. Another explanation for the cross in the woods has been given: "In the 17th century, the Boulogne woods had been for many centuries surrounded by a wall and crossed by long trails, each with its own name. At the cross-roads of these trails crosses were erected and each had a name which recalled either the name of a captain of the hunt or an owner of a nearby property." These crosses still exist in some of the forests in France. They may also be the origin of the term "crossroads".

2. Mongez, *Vie privée du cardinal Dubois, Premier ministre, archevêque de Cambrai,* London, 1789, p. 284.

3. P.N. Quillet, *Chroniques de Passy, de ses environs ou recherches historiques, statistiques et littéraires sur Passy, le bois de Boulogne et les alentours,* Paris, 1836, p. 13 (part II).

4. Penel-Beaufin, *Histoire complète de Boulogne-Billancourt et inédite, religieuse, politique, sociale et descriptive de Boulogne-Billancourt depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours d'après des documents authentiques,* Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1904, 2 vols.

5. *Bulletin de la Société historique d'Auteuil et de Passy*, 1894, 2e trimestre, T. II, pp. 179-180.

6. *Les plus excellents bastiments de France*, J. Androuet du Cerceau, Paris, 1576-79.

7. In the present *20th arrondissement*, there was another lodge associated with the hunt: "The property of the Grand Chamberlain of France extended over eight city streets in the 17th century; he also held property since the reign of Francis I on a place outside of Paris that owes its name to a 'muette', a sort of guard house for the woods nearby. It was made into a villa later, and is presently No. 31 Rue de la Muette. This street, in 1713, separated two of the barriers of

Paris, that of La Croix-Faubin on the Chemin de Charonne and that of La Roquette, which was located near the above-mentioned Muette."

8. The gallery was fitted out shortly after 1600, when the east wing was built. The Gallery of the Stags is so-called because of the collection of antlers that adorn the walls, a reminder of the primitive right of kings to hunt their food at will in the nearby forest. This gallery is 74 metres long, and 7 metres wide. The wall decorations depicting equestrian scenes from the existing royal houses of the time are by the now-unknown painter Toussaint Dubreuil. The interest of these paintings is in the representations of the houses, as they are bird's-eye views of each of the dwellings. Depicted are Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the Châteaux of Madrid and La Muette with the Bois de Boulogne, Verneuil and the Forest of Hallate, Monceaux-en-Brie, Charleval, Saint-Léger and Monfort l'Amaury, Chambord, Amboise, Blois, Villers-Cotterets, Compiègne, Folembray, Fontainebleau, Vincennes, the Louvre and the Tuileries. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the royal family lived periodically in these châteaux some part of the year.

9. At least one modern author associates the building of the first of the three Châteaux de la Muette with a known architect: "This unusual polychrome technique (developed by Pierre Chambiges for the renovation of the châteaux of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Fontainebleau) was very successful, and it was immediately copied in another royal house, disappeared since the 17th century; it was called La Muette, and it was built between 1542-1549." This would have made the first construction a work of Henry II. F. Gebelin, *Les Châteaux de France*, Paris, PUF, 1962, pp. 101-102.

10. Comte de Franqueville, *Le Château de la Muette*, Paris, 1915.

11. *La Géometrie pratique*, Paris, 1707. The building in the engraving is in fact the Château de Madrid. This engraving has been reproduced in modern literature as a representation of the first Château de la Muette.

12. "Beyond the village of Passy, one comes to the forest of Boulogne, at one time called the Forest of Rouvroy which Francis I enclosed with a wall in order to have an easier time at the hunt. The forest is only about fifteen to sixteen hundred

arpens. At the entry (coming from Passy) is a very pretty house which is called La Muette. The rooms, although not very many in number, have all the necessities of the city to ensure a comfortable stay. The gardens also have their particular beauties, and to give high praise in few words, let me just say that the King takes great pleasure in coming to La Muette to pass from time to time some part of the day." Germain Brice, *Description de Paris*, Paris, 1685, vol. I, p. 183.

13. *Mercure de France*, September, 1707, pp. 190-191.

14. It was common practice until a generation ago for translators and writers of all types to resort to Latin, or more occasionally Greek, when faced with a passage that offended the sensibilities of the time; it is interesting to compare, in this regard, translations of such works as Martial in the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries. Needless to say, the Marquis de Sade revolutionised the situation by writing whole books that were outlawed.

15. *Correspondance*, Mme la Duchesse d'Orléans, II, p. 155.

16. Claude III Audran, 1657-1734. He was a painter, decorator and engraver of the famous Audran family. He specialised in the drawing and painting of decorative designs; he worked at the châteaux of Sceaux, Marly, Meudon and the menagerie of Versailles, as well as at La Muette. His fanciful style, using arabesques, grotesques and "Chinese" styles mixed with well-drawn figures of animals, scenes from the circus and the theatre, made him a precursor of the rococo style of Louis XV. He was named Concierge of the Luxembourg Palace by the Regent, and he employed Watteau as one of his team of decorators.

17. Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, vol. VIII, p. 335.

18. *Gazette de la Régence*, pp. 175-176.

19. Saint-Simon, *op. cit*., p. 363.

20. *Correspondance de Mme la Duchesse d'Orléans*, II, p. 153.

21. The inventory of household posts was published in 1722 by the Discalced Augustinian Brother Angel; La Muette,

at the time of the death of Mme de Berry (1719) had the following established posts with rights to pensions: a concierge, a "garde-meuble", two houseboys, a park vigil, chicken house attendent, a farm maiden, a park gatekeeper, a dog keeper, a Swiss guard, a doorman, a financial controller, four inspectors, a gardener, and a fireman. These were permanent posts attached to the property of La Muette. The Duchess of Berry had between 700 and 800 other retainers on full or partial salary, with rights to a pension.

22. In the *Mercure de France* for 1719 we read, "The Marechal de Villars went with Mr. de Fontainieux and other officers in order to take proper measures to embellish the Château de La Muette, as the king enjoyed going there so often. During a recent visit, he resolved to acquire all the furniture that the Duchess de Berry had brought to the château."

23. *Mémoires du Comte de Maurepas*, 2nd Edition, p. 209.

24. Jacques Gabriel (1667-1742) and his more famous son, Jacques-Ange Gabriel (1698-1782) were both important architects in the 18th century. Jacques-Ange Gabriel worked with his father in Paris as an apprentice (the Hotel Biron); he also completed his father's work in Bordeaux (the Place Royal). He succeeded his father as first architect of the king in 1742 and became director of the Academy of Architecture. He specialised in redoing royal houses (Fontainebleau 1749, Compiègne 1751, Choisy 1752, Blois). He also performed a great deal of work at Versailles, where he began the extension of the two lateral wings of the château, and built that opera (1753). His greatest achievement was perhaps the Petit Trianon (1762-1768). He also drew up the blueprints for the Place Royal in Paris (the Place de la Concorde today), and built the two matching buildings that border the north end of the Place today (1762-1770). He also built the École Militaire on the Champs de Mars (1751-1775). He is known for his revival of classical forms in architecture, and the refined beauty of his proportions. His work at La Muette was in conjunction with his father, who was in his seventies when La Muette was being reconstructed. A document of the National Archives, D1582, catalogues the costs and prices for the improvements.

25. *Mémoires*, Duke de Luynes, I, p. 284, 2 July, 1737.

26. Comte de Franqueville, *op. cit*., p. 117.

27. D'Argensson, cited in D'Augier *Mémoires*, V.

28. *Journal de Barbier*, T. III, pp. 175-176, October 1750.

29. One of the first recorded kaleidoscope instruments was also placed in the laboratory. The Marquis de Marigny, Director General of Buildings, gave the king a painting executed by Vanloo which represented eight allegorical figures: Justice, Military Prowess, Faithfulness, etc. When viewed through a glass instrument with different lenses, the painting displayed a likeness of the king.

30. Jean-Antoine Nollet, 1700-1770. Like so many of the abbés of his day, Nollet sought orders to advance his education; he became interested in physics early in his career, and became one of the important collaborators of Réaumur. He conducted public experiments in physics in Paris from 1735 to 1760; these were closely followed by the salon set and did much to advance the public's interest in general science. He became a member of the Academy in 1742. Nollet was also one of the founders of the University of Turin, an important 18th-century centre for scientific learning.

31. From *Bulletin de la Société historique d'Auteuil et de Passy*, (SHAP) II, p. 207.

32. Mme Campan, *Mémoires*, Chapter III.

33. Faujas de Saint Fond, *Description des expériences de la machine aérostatique de MM. Mongolfier*, Paris, 1784, t. II, p. 24.

34. The sale did not exclude demolition of the buildings. As André Chastel has pointed out, often important civil and religious buildings were purposely demolished for economic reasons, not revolutionary mobs taking revenge. "This episode tells us something important. It invites us to reflect upon the fact that the principal cause of destruction of many noble castles and homes had less to do with revolutions and civil wars, however important they were, but rather were related to the difficult economic conditions of the time, that is to say, the unsuitability of certain types of building to the new forms of wealth in modern societies." – A. Chastel, "Demeures seigneuriales disparues" in *La Revue de l'Art*, No. 38, 1977.

35. In the immediate neighbourhood, three large properties were put up for sale: the Château de Madrid in the Bois de Boulogne, the Minimes Convent in Passy and the famous Abbey of Longchamp in the southern sector of the forest were all sold and demolished for their materials.

36. Rosalie Filleul was an accomplished painter and friend of both Joseph Vernet, the celebrated artist who painted the great ports of France, and Élizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, the marvellous Court painter of the end of the 18th century. Filleul, as Concierge of La Muette, was in fact allowed considerable privileges and familiarity with the royal family. It was this latter intimacy that brought her downfall.

37. The piano was first invented by Bartolomeo Cristofiori in Florence in about 1709; in its fragile, initial form it became popular in the mid-18th century. Érard was responsible for a number of important inventions in the manufacture of pianos, among them the so-called double action whereby the hammers attached to the keys would be repositioned with great speed. He claimed that this creation took him twelve years of research. He patented the invention in 1801, but did not start producing pianos with the double movement until 1811.

38. Comte de Franqueville, *Souvenirs*, Paris, 1912, p. 81.

39. The programme cited the capital city represented by the work played: *Amsterdam*, "The Dutch National Anthem"; *Berlin*, Andante and Finale of the Symphony in La by Beethoven; *Brussels*, "Tableaux Symphoniques" by Tinel; *Budapest*, "Prometheus" by Listz; *Christiana*, "Fragments from Peer Gynt" by Grieg; *Goettingen*, "Spring Song"; *Copenhagen*, "Overture from Ossian" by Gade; *Leipzig*, "The March from Lohengrin"; *London*, "The Bohemian" by Balfe; *Munich*, "Riccio" by Sanderberger; *Saint Petersburg*, "La Marche Solennelle" by Tchaikovsky; *Rome*, "Hymne de Fête" by Spontini; *Stockholm*, "Swedish Danse"; *Vienna*, "Fragments from the Jupiter Symphony" by Mozart. The absence of an American musical number means either that the Americans did not attend – or, more likely, that they were not seen as having a worthy musical offering for the concert!

40. André Pascal, *Croisière autour de mes souvenirs*, Paris, 1933.

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