

The Life of George Sand

by

John Fox

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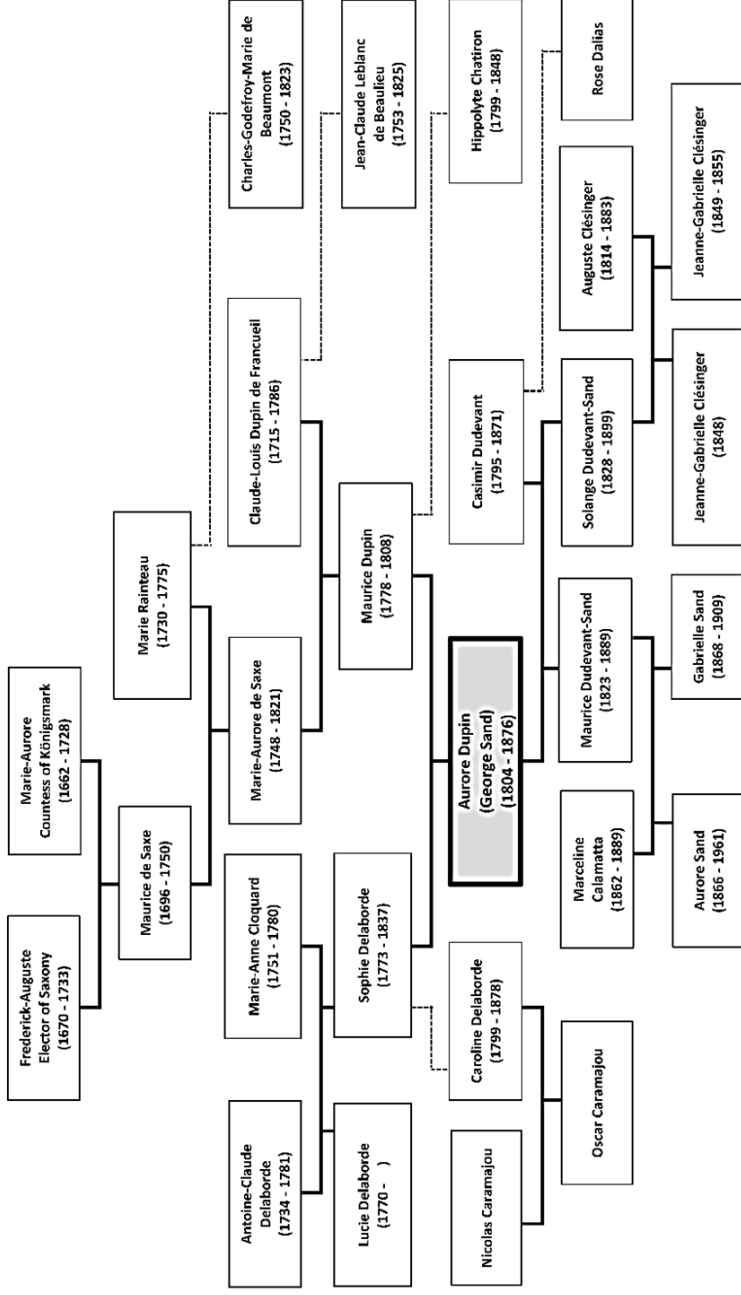
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Preface

The writing of historical biographies involves a stupendous amount of research, from the guidance provided by the works of distinguished scholars to snippets of information drawn from guidebooks. In a conversation with a New York publisher, I once declared that I could not conceivably have carried out my task without the help of Wikipedia. My admission was greeted with a snort of disgust. I wish to declare with no sense of shame the enormous help I have obtained from Wikipedia in writing this book—specifically, so useful in the spelling of names and the confirmation of dates. It is not at all unusual for biographies about George Sand to contain events, dates and names that have not been previously verified.

There is also the problem of what to do when one source contradicts another—even George Sand had the unpardonable habit of quite blatantly contradicting herself in her autobiography. Then there are the authors who put forward their own interpretations as to what motivated George Sand during a particular episode—on what basis? Each of these situations brings work to a temporary halt.

When I believed the book to be completed, I gave the manuscript to my two readers, Sarah Webborn and Valerie Antonietti. They discovered that it was far from clear and error-free. Thanks to their intervention, we now hope that these problems have been addressed. I acknowledge my debt to these two ladies and accept responsibility for any errors that remain.

The cover illustration of George Sand by Luigi Calamatta is courtesy of Alamy.

The illustration of Stéphane Ajasson de Grandsagne is courtesy of the Musées de la Ville de Paris.

The image of Pietro Pagello is courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

The illustrations of Hippolyte Chatiron, François Buloz and Gustave Planche are courtesy of Alamy.

Introduction

In mid-nineteenth century France, when George Sand was writing her novels, women were considered to be second-class citizens. Under the Napoleonic Code functioning at this time, women could neither purchase property, nor claim custody of their children nor seek divorce. In this same century and in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789, France experienced a series of political upheavals resulting in several sudden changes of regime. Meanwhile, the Romantic Movement had arrived in Europe with such figures as the poet Lord Byron achieving fame with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, demanding the emancipation of the individual—meaning men. Writing at a time of profound social change, Sand dealt frankly with the fate of women, and particularly women in love. By the 1830s, 60% of Parisian women were literate and George Sand attracted huge attention from the female reading public. Mme Aurore Dudevant (George Sand's married name) introduced stories drawn from her matrimonial distress—she did not love her husband, Casimir. Her female readers soon recognized that George Sand's woes were also their woes. In her first few novels, George Sand raised the issue of female rights and presents the situations that women have to endure because they do not enjoy the same liberties as men: the right to happiness; equality in marriage and divorce; the right to own property; freedom to choose the course of their own lives.

At the age of 27, Aurore Dudevant temporarily abandoned her husband and two small children in provincial France, and arrived in Paris, the epicentre of French culture. Within a year, she achieved fame with her first novel *Indiana*, changing her name to George Sand. During her lifetime, her output of novels and plays was prodigious—more than fifty volumes of collected works, alongside

her almost sixty novels and twenty-five plays. Her collected correspondence comprises some 20,000 letters. She never claimed that her writing was of high quality and the poet Charles Baudelaire, never a 'gentle' man, called her *une vache à écrire*, "a writing animal", since she could dash off twenty or thirty pages of manuscript in one go every day, frequently in the middle of the night. One of the oft-repeated anecdotes about George Sand is that, if she finished one novel before her usual bedtime of 4 o'clock in the morning, she would take a blank sheet of paper and begin another one. Although it is not known whether this anecdote is apocryphal, we do know that in 1844, she wrote *Jeanne* in the spring, *Le Meunier d'Angibault* in the summer and *La Mare au Diable* in the autumn.

It will become clear that, after writing a number of masterpieces, she sometimes felt obliged in the second half of her life to write mediocre novels with the unique purpose of raising some cash; as one critic remarked: "In order to pay the baker." Despite her books being consumed with enthusiasm by readers throughout nineteenth-century Europe, her novels are not true to life and her dialogues often sound like a series of long-winded monologues. This may account for the fact that today they are less read.

Her easy flowing storytelling style recounts simple and moralizing tales. Many of her books feature some central female character who is an idealization of herself: *Indiana* (1832) is a stinging critique of marriage, while *Lélia* (1832) raised with scandalous candour the issue of female sexuality. Drawing on her childhood experiences of the Berry countryside in central France, she wrote the celebrated pastoral novels: *Jeanne* (1844); *La Mare au Diable* [The Devil's Pond] (1846); *François le Champi* [François the Waif] (1847–1848); *La Petite Fadette* (1849); and *Les Maîtres sonneurs* [The Bagpipers] (1853). The themes were about love transcending the obstacles of convention and

class—an aristocratic man/woman falls for a peasant woman/man. Sand expressed an idealized picture of life in the countryside making it the stuff of legends.

She moved between the literary, artistic and musical worlds, being a personal friend of an extraordinary number of famous men and women, including the writers Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas (both father and son) and Gustave Flaubert, the painter Eugène Delacroix, the pianist and composer Franz Liszt, the philosopher Abbé de Lamennais, as well as Pauline Viardot, the nineteenth century's most gifted singer. She was notorious for her liaison with Frederick Chopin, with whom she lived in Paris and at her country estate at Nohant. For nine years, she nursed the frail composer through several terrible crises of tuberculosis but their relationship did not survive a bitter family quarrel triggered by her tempestuous daughter Solange.

Sand's love life was as dramatic as her novels. Aged 19, she found herself married to Casimir Dudevant, a country squire who was no match for her intellect. After accepting a subordinate role with her husband for eight years, she moved to Paris and lived for a time with her lover, Jules Sandeau. Even while still married, she had a very impressive string of lovers and made little effort to conceal her private life. After a fling with the writer Prosper Mérimée, she became involved in a turbulent relationship with the poet Alfred de Musset. Other lovers enjoyed her favour momentarily before being cast off with ruthless aplomb. She often assumed a maternal role in her love affairs, sometimes associating with men who were in need of a nurse as much as a mistress.

By her birth and upbringing George Sand found herself placed somewhere between the aristocracy and the working class, with a foot in each. She was brought up in the countryside and throughout her life liked to speak in the local dialect and respect its traditions.

Although she was taught to behave as an aristocrat by her grandmother, as a child she lived on an equal footing and felt at home in the company of the peasant children in her village. She also believed that her working-class mother, Sophie Dupin, to whom she was devoted, had been treated very badly by her blue-blooded grandmother, born as Marie-Aurore de Saxe. After her father Maurice Dupin died in a riding accident and her mother's return to Paris to live with her sister, she was brought up by her enlightened grandmother and a slightly crazy tutor, Jean-François Deschartres, who dressed her in boys' clothes and introduced her to masculine pastimes. The result was that George Sand lived like an aristocrat but considered herself by instinct a democrat, always searching for the ideal republic. With her coterie of friends from the town of La Châtre, she was opposed to royalists and dictators. Anyone who called themselves 'king' or 'emperor' was by her definition simply a tyrant. At school, she was brought up as a Catholic Christian but as a young woman abandoned these beliefs.

During the Age of Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century philosophers, particularly Voltaire and Rousseau, turned literature into a weapon that could be used to demolish religion and threaten governments. By her education, George Sand was confronted with the atheism of these great writers and participated herself in the Age of Romanticism. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, art and culture were marked by this movement, which encouraged poets, authors, composers and painters to return to the legends, stories, songs and popular beliefs dating from antiquity. Eventually, it evolved into a focus on contemporary popular customs, habits and attitudes, including the way of life conducted by the general population. It followed that throughout Europe during the nineteenth century national schools emerged in painting, architecture and literature reflecting romantic and historical themes, as well as

daily life. Writers then delved into the problems of human existence which led, finally, to the popularity of 'rustic' novels.

It has been said that George Sand lived a generation ahead of her time. In nineteenth century France, women were denied political rights and she did not expect this situation to change in the short term, believing that the requirements of maternity were incompatible with the assumption of public functions. On the other hand, she expected the education of women, their rights in marriage and their privileges to be on a par with those of men. Without these civil liberties, women became subjugated and exploited through the requirement of fidelity in marriage. Why was a woman required to be chaste when a man was not? A woman who was unfaithful to her husband risked ostracism and prison, while an adulterous husband might simply run the risk of knowing smiles from his peers. For Sand, it was not a crime for a woman to fall into the arms of her lover but it was to give herself to a man she no longer loved. She was accused of being a bad influence by "encouraging vice" among young people, perverting entire generations, and particularly for promoting the emancipation of women. Critics blamed her for all situations where wives abandoned their husbands, all divorces and all political unrest in mid-century France, particularly during the events accompanying the 1848 Revolution. Even the Pope contributed to her fame by forbidding good Catholics from reading her books. Ultimately, the fears and anxieties of her detractors only demonstrated that she was a great force to be reckoned with due to the "pernicious, terrifying and destructive" influence of her writing. On the other hand, her books were widely admired both by other writers and the general public, who found her influence beneficial, invigorating and educational.

There is an enigma wrapped in a mystery concerning the birth of Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin de Francueil—George Sand's full

name at birth. In the autobiographical *Story of My Life*, she declares four times that she was born on 5 July 1804 (16 *Messidor*, Year XII according to the official calendar of the French Republic). However, a few pages later, she gives her true date of birth as 1 July (12 *Messidor*). The parish register for the third *arrondissement* of Paris registered her birth as Amandine-Aurore-Lucie at 15 rue Meslée, Paris, on 2 July as the legitimate daughter of Maurice-François Dupin and Antoinette-Sophie-Victoire de la Borde. Among the witnesses were Marie-Lucie de la Borde (the mother's sister) and Armand-Jean-Louis Maréchal (Marie-Lucie's fiancé). Nevertheless, there are doubts about Sand's origins. First, if Aurore Dupin was born on 1 July 1804 and one counts backwards, it means she must have been conceived in October 1803. But in October 1803, her mother Sophie Delaborde was living in Paris, while her father was staying with his mother on the family estate in the French countryside. Did the couple meet from time to time? What if Maurice Dupin was not her real father? Did Sand herself half-suspect, half-know that her paternal heritage was uncertain? Whose daughter was she? Several people she met, observing her dark hair, Mediterranean features and olive skin (her lover Alfred de Musset called it "bronze"), immediately took her to be Spanish.

There is a shadowy male figure from Sand's early life who makes a major contribution to this enigma—Louis-Mammès Pierret, her mother's companion after the death of Sand's father, Maurice Dupin. Pierret occupied a special place in Aurore's early life. George Sand weaves a complicated and unlikely story of how Pierret and her mother, Sophie Dupin, met. It is clear from this account that George Sand is attempting to demonstrate that Pierret *had not been acquainted with her mother, Sophie Dupin, before the birth of Aurore*. However, this cannot possibly be true for, on Aurore Dupin's birth certificate, Louis-Mammès Pierret's name already appears as one of the witnesses on the mother's side of the family! Sand's statement that Pierret "kept his

distance" from Sophie is clearly designed to distract the reader from the temptation of thinking otherwise. In reality, following the death of her father Maurice Dupin, Pierret and Sophie appear to have lived together for twenty-seven years—from 1810 to 1837. No marriage certificate has materialized concerning this couple but Pierret emerges as a central, enigmatic, almost paternal figure in Aurore's early life and remained with her mother Sophie until her death. He managed the property owned by George Sand on the Rue de Narbonne in Paris, loyally attended productions of her plays, participated in family celebrations and was a witness at the marriages of both Caroline Delaborde (Sand's illegitimate half-sister) and Hippolyte Chatiron (Sand's illegitimate half-brother). Sand never wrote to her mother without expressing affection for Pierret. He became a surrogate grandfather to both of Aurore's children. Aurore Dupin had a real father and a foster father—but which was which? As a writer of fiction, George Sand leaves hints but never quite lifts the veil.

George Sand heaps unreserved praise on Pierret: "A priceless man, whom I shall miss for the rest of my life." He was not good looking, with a heavy face, a big, flat nose, a wide mouth and tiny eyes. However, his moral qualities eclipsed his looks: "Pure, loyal, generous [...] his soul was that much more beautiful [...] the notion of evil never touched his honourable and simple soul." It was sitting on Pierret's shoulders during a military parade in Paris in 1807 that Aurore Dupin had glimpsed Emperor Napoléon I, who returned her gaze with a warm smile. George Sand contradicts herself several times when describing Pierret: he did not meet Sophie until after Aurore Dupin's birth—false; he did not share his life with Sophie after 1810—false; he was not very bright—false; she claims that Pierret eventually married a general's daughter—false. There is no documentation whatsoever to support any of these assertions, whereas we know that Pierret lived with Sophie Dupin until she died in 1837. After Sophie's death, Pierret

and George Sand remained very close, particularly concerning the management of the Hôtel de Narbonne townhouse in Paris. Sand describes Pierret's episodes of emotion and demands for affection, one explanation suggesting that they were connected with the proprietary rights he might have felt about being Aurore's unacknowledged father: "It's just that I love you," he said.

Contradicting her earlier story that Louis-Mammès Pierret first made Sophie Dupin's acquaintance *after* her birth, George Sand now tells us in *Story of My Life* what we have suspected all along—the much-beloved Pierret, this unlikely individual, "witnessed my birth [...] weaned me [...] assumed a paternal right." He worked in the French Government Treasury, alternately described as a 'superintendent' and as an 'employee'. Finding Sophie exhausted by her daughter's constant crying at night, the 22-year-old Pierret exercised his 'paternal' rights by taking the baby away to his home and feeding her on milk and sugar. Pierret was "more intelligent than my mother" and also took charge of her father's, Maurice Dupin's, personal and business affairs, paid his bills and ensured that he received his military salary wherever he was stationed. It follows that he must have known Aurore's mother and father for years before the latter's death. In 1832, aged 28, Sand jotted down some notes addressed to an anonymous person known as 'L' concerned with secrecy and guilt. She counsels discretion and silence as the best way of protecting himself: "None of us who live lacklustre, unpersecuted lives are untainted or unencumbered or without some hidden flaw or some hidden misfortune." It was during the cholera epidemic in 1832 that Pierret paid Aurore an early morning visit in her Parisian apartment. He was turned away by her doctor Émile Regnault, but caught sight of the sleeping figure of Jules Sandeau. Aurore sent Pierret a volley of letters to excuse herself for this incident. In a parallel text written at the same time she refers to "Byron's secret", wherein he is reputed to

have fathered an illicit child with his own sister, Augusta Leigh. Pierret's first name begins with 'L'.

He died falling down a staircase in Paris on 31 October 1844. Sand is curiously silent on the subject of his death but, when writing to his sister in Poland, her partner Frederick Chopin describes that, after being invited to dinner with an acquaintance "the oldest friend of the father and mother" fell down some stairs and died a few hours later. It was shortly after Pierret's death that Sand revisited the manuscript addressed to 'L'. Sand's devotion to Pierret is confirmed by a letter she wrote to him after her mother's death: "And you, my dear old friend, if anything could make me love you more, it would be your devotion to my mother during her illness [...] But the friendship that binds us goes back so far that it has neither a beginning nor an end."

Although George Sand claims that her biographical *Story of My Life*, written between 1847 and 1854, is a "sincere study of my own nature and a careful examination of my own existence", many of the facts have been shamelessly rewritten to suit her purposes, some major events have been passed over in silence and there are long passages of incidental trivia containing verbatim conversations that can only be fictitious. She frequently omitted key events that did not correspond to her narrative and succumbed to tinkering with the letters exchanged between her mother and father so as to reproduce a false reality closer to her ideal. George Sand declared that the *Story of My Life* was written with the purpose of presenting her life to her readers with *the most scrupulous honesty*; however, this statement is far from reliable for the book corresponds to a doctored version of reality redrafted with an eye for public consumption. Some biographers have dismissed the *Story of My Life* as so vague, deficient and inexact that it is useless as a source book. On the other hand, her fiction abounds with the themes that reflected her daily existence: adoption, adultery,

betrayal, illegitimacy, infidelity, kidnapping, love, marriage, paternity. In short, her autobiography is full of evident fictions, while her 'fictitious' novels seem to be inspired by actual experiences drawn from her private life included in *Indiana*, *Valentine*, *Mattéa*, *Lélia*, *Elle et lui*, *Le Toast*, *Lucrezia Floriani*, *Spiridion*, *Isidora*, *Le Poëme de Myrza* and *Le Diable aux champs*.

Sand's struggle with illicit paternity was visited upon her daughter. Solange was the fruit of an amorous adventure in Paris with Stéphane Ajasson de Grandsagne in 1827. Even though the peccadilloes of men and women were judged on two quite different scales, Aurore's husband Casimir Dudevant seems to have accepted Solange as his daughter knowing full well that she was not. The beautiful, intelligent Solange would grow up to become the bane of George Sand's life.

Chapter I

The grandmother, Marie-Aurore de Saxe

As a 13-year-old boy cadet in 1709, Maurice de Saxe had already distinguished himself in combat at the Battle of Malplaquet. He rose through the ranks to become one of the most illustrious military tacticians in history. Most famously, Maurice de Saxe defeated the Austrians, the Dutch and the British at the Battle of Fontenoy in 1745 while leading the army of French King Louis XV. The king was himself present on the battlefield and therefore enjoyed the great prestige of being nominally in charge. Maurice de Saxe was rewarded by being made Field Marshal of France and granted possession of the Château de Chambord—an enormous palace-cum-hunting lodge near the Loire valley constructed in 1615 by King François I. It had been abandoned for many years and was considered by many, with its 441 rooms, seventy-four staircases and its own theatre, as something of a white elephant. It ranked second only to Versailles in magnificence.

Births out of wedlock were a long-standing tradition in Maurice de Saxe's family with himself born as the illegitimate child of Frederick-Auguste I, Elector of Saxony, and his Swedish mistress Marie-Aurore, Countess of Königsmark. To complicate this affair, Marie-Aurore was a good friend of Frederick-Auguste's wife, Christiane Eberhardine "von" Brandenburg-Bayreuth, and both women gave birth to boys only days apart in 1696. The following year, Frederick-Auguste was crowned King of Poland under the title of Auguste II. The Countess of Königsmark retired to a Protestant abbey and concentrated on the upbringing of her son. As an illegitimate child, Maurice had an immense desire to benefit from the titles and honours that might put

him on an equal footing with his legitimate half-brother. When he was 15 years old, his father recognized him as his son, confirmed his title as Count de Saxe and placed him in a regiment partly composed of his bastard offspring. Maurice was later dispatched to the court of France at Versailles.

Alongside an amazingly successful military career in the service of France, Maurice de Saxe seduced numerous princesses and actresses. He liked to travel with a group of players who would put on shows to entertain his troops. An enterprising gentleman called Louis Rainteau [there are several spellings of his name] persuaded Maurice de Saxe to appoint him to the post of managing the storage of pillaged war goods. The unscrupulous Rainteau knew that the 50-year-old Maurice de Saxe led a sybaritic life-style and, in order to ensure his good standing with the marshal, introduced him to his two daughters who were actresses in the troupe: 17-year-old Marie and 15-year-old Geneviève, known by their stage name as 'the Verrières sisters'. After an inconclusive adventure with the adolescent Geneviève, the marshal transferred his attention to the elder sister. Marie was remarkable for her beauty and intelligence, so that before long the middle-aged marshal installed her in an upper-class Parisian residence near his own town house. From this relationship on 20 September 1748 was born a baby girl, Marie-Aurore de Saxe, named after Maurice de Saxe's mother—this child would become George Sand's grandmother. Maurice de Saxe took no interest whatsoever in his illegitimate children and the baby was officially registered as the child of some fictitious parents. Although Rainteau was eventually arrested and jailed for mismanagement, he had successfully established his two daughters in French high society under their fabricated name of Verrières, subsequently enhanced to the more aristocratic sounding 'de Verrières'. The marshal awarded generous pensions to Marie Rainteau and her daughter Marie-Aurore.

Marie Rainteau had a number of romantic adventures with wealthy gentlemen, but managed to convince Maurice de Saxe of her faithfulness by passing her lovers off as clients of her sister Geneviève. Then, in order to rekindle the marshal's interest in her and to improve her diction, she asked the well-known playwright Jean-François Marmontel to give her coaching lessons, the advantage being that, if she could become a member of the royal theatre troupe, she would be granted exemption from oppressive laws. Unfortunately, Marie and Marmontel fell in love while the marshal was on a tour of inspection. When the marshal found out about their affair, he stopped her pensions. Fifteen months later in 1750, the still bitter Maurice de Saxe died aged 54 leaving Marie Rainteau with nothing in his will. Marie subsequently gave birth to a son, Charles-Godefroy-Marie de Beaumont, Marie-Aurore's half-brother and George Sand's great-uncle, who would become a priest. In the genealogical tables, his father's name is given as Charles-Godefroy de La Tour d'Auvergne, Duke de Bouillon. We shall meet Aurore's great-uncle again from time to time. Since the death of Marie-Aurore's illustrious father, it was one of his nephews, the Count de Friesen, who provided for her upkeep until his death in 1755, leaving the 7-year-old child without any means of support. However, one of Maurice de Saxe's nieces had married Louis XV's eldest son—the Dauphin, the heir to the French throne. Marie Rainteau addressed a request for recognition of her daughter's parentage to this lady, Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, who was in fact Marie-Aurore's aunt living in the Palais de Versailles. She would, incidentally, be the mother of three future French kings: Louis XVI, Louis XVIII and Charles X. Marie-Aurore believed that, as the daughter of Maurice de Saxe, she was entitled to benefit from any royal pensions that would have been paid to her father. The result was that Marie-Josèphe's father-in-law, King Louis XV, granted a generous royal pension to Marie-Aurore de Saxe as the daughter of his late general. As part of this arrangement, she was taken away from

her mother and placed in the École de Saint-Cyr, which provided the best possible education available for the daughters of the nobility. Her keen intelligence and quick wit soon charmed her companions, as well as her teachers.

When Marie-Aurore was 18 years old and at the end of her education, the Dauphine decided that she must find a suitable husband for her protégée, but doubts were raised over her true lineage arising from her false birth certificate. Marie-Aurore addressed an appeal to the *Parlement de Paris*. After a thorough investigation, the *parlement* declared that: “Marie-Aurore is the illegitimate daughter of Maurice, Count de Saxe, Field Marshal of the French Army, and of Marie Raintau [sic]”. Although this outcome did not restore her standing with the aristocracy, it did provide her with recognition and financial security. The king granted her an annual pension of 800 livres and required her to remain in a convent.

With the obstacle of her birthright overcome, in 1766 Marie-Aurore was married off to a 44-year-old infantry captain named Antoine de Horne, one of Louis XV’s illegitimate sons. Her mother, who she had not met since childhood, hosted a sumptuous reception for the bride and groom at her country residence. Marie-Aurore had never met her husband before, nor her half-brother Charles-Godefroy-Marie. She was warned by Horne’s valet and doctor that her new husband was suffering from an ‘unspeakable’ illness. For this reason, the marriage was never consummated. Shortly afterwards, Horne was appointed as the king’s lieutenant-governor at the town of Sélestadt in Alsace, with the couple moving there. Within a week of their arrival in Sélestadt, Horne was killed in a duel on 20 February 1767, leaving Marie-Aurore a widow at the age of 18. Her husband left her nothing but a new name.

Rather daringly, she asked Louis XV to appoint her to her deceased husband's post. When this request was refused, she was evicted from her residence with no other means of support than entering a convent for indigent widows. Her next move in 1767 was to petition her patroness, the Dauphine, but this served no purpose since, unfortunately, Marie-Josèphe lay on her deathbed. She then approached Louis XV himself, but he did not respond. Next she appealed to the Minister of War, the Duke de Choiseul, with her request being turned down. Finally, she wrote to the famous and wealthy poet Voltaire who had a reputation for providing shelter for impoverished young women and had written a famous poem commemorating the Battle of Fontenoy. He only referred her politely back to the Choiseuls.

Forbidden from returning to the royal court at Versailles and at the end of her tether, Marie-Aurore moved in with her mother and Aunt Geneviève who lived as courtesans between their fashionable Parisian townhouse and their country residence at Auteuil in the suburbs. The de Verrières' lifestyle, financed by a series of romantic liaisons with a wealthy male clientele, attracted the brightest lights of Parisian society. Despite her mother and aunt's loose morals, Marie-Aurore remained immaculately pure. In 1772, given the questionable nature of her mother's and her aunt's way of life, Marie-Aurore once more presented her need for financial support to the government and was rewarded two years later with an annual grant of 3,000 livres. The timing was fortunate for her mother, Marie de Verrières, died unexpectedly the following year aged about 45, leaving her daughter homeless.

The 27-year-old Marie-Aurore retired to a respectable convent, the Dames de Calvaire, with her maid. In this cloistered environment, the serious and contemplative Marie-Aurore devoted herself to the

intellectual pursuits of reading and study. Shunning her mother's and aunt's way of life, she was a talented musician, singer and actress. One of the de Verrières' clients had been a charming, elderly gentleman called Claude-Louis Dupin de Francueil. He was a wealthy businessman and tax collector for the Berry region in central France, but was also a delightful companion. Dupin de Francueil's father had been an economist and an extremely wealthy tax collector, enabling him to purchase the most glamorous of the French châteaux—Chenonceau. Having recently terminated a relationship with Marie-Aurore's aunt Geneviève, Claude-Louis Dupin de Francueil maintained his friendship with her niece, to the extent that she began to call him 'papa'. In January 1777, the 62-year-old Dupin de Francueil and the 29-year-old Marie-Aurore de Horne travelled to London and were married very discreetly at the French embassy—rather than in a church. The couple did, however, later sanctify their marriage in a Parisian church upon their return. George Sand tells us that her grandmother had no religious beliefs whatsoever apart from sharing the remote deism of the eighteenth-century, French philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire. These men had no faith in the existence of a Christian God but believed that the Universe must have been set in motion by some almighty hand. Marie-Aurore described her husband to her granddaughter, later to become George Sand:

Your grandfather [...] was handsome, intelligent, smart, graceful, perfumed, playful, friendly, affectionate and always in a good humour until the day he died. [...]. His mind was an encyclopaedia of ideas, of knowledge, of skills, [...] He had the gift always to be occupied in an agreeable way for other people, as well as for himself. By day, he played music with me; he was an excellent violinist and even made violins himself, for he was a luthier, as well as being a watchmaker, an architect, a woodturner, a painter, a locksmith, a decorator, a cook, a poet, a composer, a carpenter; he could also sew well.

As a young man, Dupin de Francueil had been a close friend of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, so Marie-Aurore asked her husband if it would be possible for him to introduce her to the great philosopher. Now no longer a young man, Rousseau had become a strange and tormented creature—the meeting did not go well.

The Dupin de Francueil couple lived in considerable luxury during the summer months at the Château Raoul in the town of Châteauroux. In winter, they moved back to Paris where Marie-Aurore gave birth to Maurice Dupin in the well-to-do Marais quarter of Paris on 9 January 1778. The father died in 1786 when the boy was 8 years old, three years before the outbreak of the French Revolution, during which, as a tax-collector, he would surely have perished. Dupin de Francueil left his affairs in a state of disarray but, when all debts were settled, his widow still had a considerable income of 75,000 francs per year. The mother devoted herself to her son's upbringing as an aristocrat. For his education, she hired the 26-year-old 'Abbot' Jean-François Deschartres, a pedantic, irascible and contradictory man, but who would devote a large part of his life to educating his charge and, later, to running the family estate.

Three years after her husband died, the French Revolution broke out and Marie-Aurore found herself in an ambivalent situation. By her education during the Age of Enlightenment, she was sympathetic to the deism of Voltaire, as well as to Rousseau's revolutionary ideas about the social hierarchy. She was linked to the royalist *ancien régime* by her social connections, while her husband's private fortune allowed her to live like an aristocrat. She had, in the meantime, been humiliated by the reigning powers during her struggle to be recognized as Maurice de Saxe's daughter. After witnessing the tumult on the streets of Paris on 14 July 1789, she moved discreetly

with her son Maurice and his tutor Deschartres into an apartment on the quiet Rue de Bondy.

In the summer of 1789, those members of the aristocracy with the clearest appreciation of the situation soon began to flee France, but Marie-Aurore Dupin chose to stay. Significantly, she contributed 65,000 livres to a fund assembled to support those nobles who had left the country but found themselves without financial support, including King Louis XVI's youngest brother, the Count d'Artois (who would one day much later be crowned as Charles X, King of France). After four preliminary years of turmoil during which the hard-line Jacobin revolutionaries gradually took control of the political situation, in 1793 Paris entered the fever-pitch period known as 'The Terror' where members of the royal family, aristocrats, priests and political opponents were summarily executed on the guillotine by the thousands. Thinking that it would be more prudent to live in the countryside, on 23 August 1793, Marie-Aurore purchased a country estate from a local man, Philippe Piaron de Serennes, for 230,000 livres. The estate lay between the towns of Châteauroux and Le Châtre in the Berry region of central France, some 150 kilometres south-west of Paris. The Nohant estate had been repossessed by the state during the French Revolution and purchased by the speculator Piaron de Serennes. She was about to move to this peaceful haven when new laws were passed requiring the wealthy to give up their valuables. Fatefully, Marie-Aurore, with the assistance of her landlord, decided to conceal in a mezzanine above her apartment her silver dinner service and some jewellery, as well as the documents concerning her loan to the nobles' fund. She was denounced and a search by the revolutionary guards on 5 *Frimaire* Year II (25 November 1793) revealed the hidden dinner service and the jewellery—but, fortunately, not the compromising documents connecting her with the loan to the Count d'Artois. Four official wax seals were placed in the

mezzanine to forbid access, with Mme Dupin arrested and thrown into a women's prison in the Convent of the English Augustinians in Paris (with which we shall become very familiar).

Over the course of two nights, her son's tutor Deschartres, with amazing sang-froid, broke the wax seals in the mezzanine and destroyed the undiscovered documents concerning the loan. He managed to replace the first seal at the entrance but did not have time to restore the others, hoping that the authorities, finding the first seal intact, would look no further. If these documents had been discovered, Mme Dupin would surely have ended her days on the guillotine.

During this uncompromising period of the revolution, Deschartres abandoned his religious costume and the title of 'abbot' in favour of 'citizen' and spent the next year bringing up the 15-year-old Maurice Dupin alone. Deschartres and his charge were able to visit Mme Dupin from time to time in a parlour at the convent. However, the National Convention soon passed further laws adopting an increasingly fanatical stance forcing all those with a 'noble' past to take up residence outside the city's walls. While the visits to the convent stopped, Maurice continued to write heartfelt letters to his mother. However, in his mother's absence, Maurice began to mature physically and mentally. Although this independence was involuntary, he felt guilty about it.

In France, there were two calendars functioning between 1793 and 1806—the Gregorian calendar (beginning on 1 January) and the Revolutionary (decimal) calendar (beginning on the autumn equinox, 22 September—labelled 1 *Vendémiaire*). During the summer of 1794, Robespierre was overthrown by the Thermidorian Revolution and Marie-Aurore Dupin was finally released from prison on 4 *Fructidor* Year II (21 August 1794). Immediately following her release, Marie-

Aurore, Maurice, Deschartes, two servants and two dogs sought a safe refuge in their country estate in the village of Nohant-Vic. The property had originally been a feudal château dating from the fourteenth century but with the moat filled in, a vegetable garden created and the view extended, it had been reconstructed as a commodious but plain manor house. With the revenue generated by the estate and the remains of her fortune, Mme Dupin's annual revenue amounted to about 15,000 francs, one fifth of what it had been before the Revolution. However, with frugal management, the residents were able to live in comfort at Nohant.

Very soon Maurice made friends in the local community with families whose names would eventually become the associates of George Sand: Decerfz, Duvernay, Latouche, Papet and Fleury. Maurice played the violin in an amateur orchestra and appeared on stage in the nearby town of La Châtre. In order for him to become the well-bred aristocrat his mother desired, when Maurice was 18 in 1796 she sent him with Deschartres to be introduced into Parisian society. Here, dressed in the latest fashion, he was invited to the residences of many of her old aristocratic acquaintances. His letters home make constant references to his former maid whom he left behind in Nohant. His trip to Paris may have been designed by his mother to remove him from the maid's presence. Soon after his departure from Nohant, 20-year-old Anne-Cathérine Chatiron, the daughter of a carpenter, gave birth to his son. Although the mother was dismissed, Mme Dupin decided to keep the baby near to her baptizing him as Hippolyte Chatiron. This child would become George Sand's half-brother and would retain his position within the family circle for the rest of his life. In correspondence, he bore the soubriquet "Little House".

It was a time of war. After the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, neighbouring countries threatened to restore the Bourbon royal

family to the throne by invading France, while for its part the French Republican Government rose up with the exact opposite intention of overthrowing royal governments throughout Europe. Whatever Mme Dupin had in mind for her son, her plans were dashed in September 1798 when universal conscription was ordered. The 20-year-old Maurice enrolled in the Revolutionary Army with the rank of private in the light cavalry. He soon grew a moustache and was promoted from private to corporal, eventually becoming an officer and aide-de-camp to a general—this last promotion may well have saved his life. Although he was involved in many military actions, he was never destined to share the illustrious career of his grandfather. In fact, Maurice much preferred playing his violin and piano to soldiering. To be noticed in the Revolutionary Army, it was necessary for an officer to possess good horses and wear the very latest fashion in hussar's uniforms. In his letters, Maurice often begs his mother for more money to satisfy his need for a smart uniform and splendid horses, since his military salary barely allowed him to survive. In November 1799, Napoléon Bonaparte came to power. It was, however, a year later that the extremely handsome Lieutenant Maurice Dupin came into contact with his general's mistress, the pretty, laughing, 27-year-old Antoinette-Sophie-Victoire Delaborde. At various times she used each of her three given names but in this book she will be known as Sophie. Matters quickly became very serious. To add to her disappointment about her son's career, Marie-Aurore Dupin would soon lose control of her son's destiny as his affair with Sophie Delaborde turned into a giant leap backwards on the scale of social acceptability.

Both parties had had illegitimate children from previous affairs: Sophie had given birth in 1799 to George Sand's half-sister Caroline. As noted above, Maurice had seduced one of his mother's housemaids, which had resulted in the birth of Hippolyte Chatiron. A