

MARIE-AIMÉE DE ROHAN
DUCHESSÉ DE CHEVREUSE 1600 - 1679

Marie-Aimée de Rohan, duchesse de Chevreuse, 1600 - 1679, was a daughter of Hercule de Rohan, duc de Montbazon, prince de Guémenée, comte de Rochefort etc. and Madeleine de Lenoncourt.

She was born in Paris in 1600 and married at seventeen to Honoré d'Albert, duc de Luynes (d. 1621), a trusted favourite of King Louis XIII. After his death she married again, in 1622, this time the charming Claude de Lorraine, duc de Chevreuse. Twenty years her senior, he was renowned for his amorous attentions towards the mistresses of Henri IV (with whom Marie had had a turbulent affair during her first marriage).

With Luynes she had a son François, duc de Luynes, who married his cousin Anne de Rohan, and a daughter Marie-Eléonore, who became abbess of Caen. With Chevreuse she had another daughter Charlotte, who was briefly engaged to the duc de Conti and died suddenly in 1652.

Marie, duchesse de Chevreuse, was one of the most powerful and fascinating figures not only of the French Court but even of her time. As duchesse de Chevreuse and as an adventurous heroine she found her way to historical literature in the novels by Alexandre Dumas and in the nineteenth century into Gaetano Donizetti's opera, *Maria di Rohan* (Libretto by Salvatore Cammarano, after the drama *Un duel sous le cardinal de Richelieu* by Lockroy and Edmond Badon). The opera was not only Donizetti's favourite but also the most popular one during his lifetime. The première was in June 1843 in the Kärntner Theatre in Vienna and in November that year it was performed in Paris. It is a dramatic version of the love affairs of Marie and the two Dukes, Chevreuse and Chalais, and of their intrigues against Richelieu.

At the age of eighteen Marie became an influential advisor and confidante of the French Queen Anne d'Autriche. She played an important role as an intermediary in the Queen's affair with Lord Buckingham to whom she was also attracted. As Richelieu said: "*Elle a été la perte de la reine, dont le bon sens naturel a été forcé par ses mauvais exemples*". She was liberal for her time, and defending her huguenot relations, her tendency to intrigues was sometimes directed against Louis XIII. She also greatly influenced the Queen. As a determined and dangerous adversary to the two cardinals, Richelieu and Mazarin, she was frequently banished from the Court and had to flee France several times, finding asylum on various occasions in Lorraine, England and Spain. Among her numerous lovers were, reputedly: Lord Holland - King Charles I of England's envoy, (and likely also Lord Buckingham), Henri de Talleyrand, Lord Montagu - Earl of Manchester, Charles de l'Aubespine, the marquis de Chateaufeuf, François de Levis-Ventadour, and marquis de Chalais, with whom she conspired against Richelieu and who was executed in 1626 after the plot was uncovered. (The Donizetti opera is based on this story.) Her last love was Geoffroy, marquis de Laigue, baron de Plessy-Pavay, thirteen years her junior, with whom she had a faithful relationship for a decade until he died in 1674. In 1633 they withdrew to Dampierre, outside Paris, and after his death she retired to a convent and devoted her life to prayer and repentance. She died 1679 in Gagny.

Her contemporaries described her as an extraordinary beauty, musical, intelligent, open-minded, with political ambition. Her long life was full of adventures, love affairs, intrigues and conspiracies. She not only fascinated her contemporaries but also inspired literature. Mazarin said of her "*La France n'a été calme que quand elle n'était pas là*"; La Rochefoucault: "*Etant galante, vive, hardie, entreprenante, elle pouvait se servir de tous ses charmes, pour réussir dans ses dessins*"; and Fontaney-Mareuil: "*Rien n'était quasi impossible à une femme aussi belle et avec autant d'esprit que celle-là*".

