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The Journal of John Waldie Theatre Commentaries, 1799-1830

Title

Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson) and John Waldie

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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/88r6252h>

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Publication Date

2008-10-15

Lady Morgan [Sydney Owenson] and John Waldie

23. Lady Morgan, Sydney Owenson. Portrait by Rene Theodore Berthon. Reproduced from the collection of the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI 133)

24. Morgan, Lady (Sydney), 1783-1859. *Passages from my autobiography* / by Sydney Lady Morgan. London: R. Bentley, 1859. UCLA YRL Special Collections: PR 5059 M3A2 1859).

25. Waldie, John, 1781-1862. Letter to Richard Bentley, 1859. Collection 830, box 2. Richard Bentley and Son Papers, 1800-1936. UCLA Charles E. Young Library Department of Special Collections.



23. Lady Morgan, Sydney Owenson

Lady Morgan (ca. 1776–1859), was born Sydney Owenson, eldest daughter of Robert Owenson, a roving Irish actor, and Jane Hill, whom Robert met while on tour in England. The most successful of her early novels was *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). She entered the household of John Hamilton, 1st Marquess of Abercorn, and in 1812, persuaded by Anne Jane Gore, Lady Abercorn, she married the surgeon to the household, Thomas Charles Morgan, who received knighthood.

Four months before her death (14 April 1859), she published an autobiography composed of excerpts from her diary and her letters. In it, she recounts that, while residing in Paris in 1818/19, she was visited by John Waldie, whom she described as an intrusive bore. In her snide reference to Waldie wanting to meet the actor of the title role in *The Dog of Montargis* (Pixérécourt's *Le Chien de Montargis*, 1814; see Waldie's account on 6 August 1817, XL, 170), Lady Morgan deprecated Waldie's fascination with the stage. In fact, Waldie was eager to meet the great French actor, François Joseph Talma (1763-1826).

24. Morgan, Lady (Sydney), 1783-1859. *Passages from my autobiography* / by Sydney Lady Morgan. London: R. Bentley, 1859. UCLA YRL Special Collections: PR 5059 M3A2 1859).

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Diary. –The gods take care of Cæsar! – that may be said in truth of the profound bore, “who comes, and sees, and conquers!” He knows he is a bore, and he trades upon it. I have two bores who haunt me, male and female. They began in Kildare Street, they continue it in Paris, and they will pursue me to the Pontine Marshes!*

“They stop the chariot, and they board the barge”

[Alexander Pope, Epistle VII. To Dr. Arbuthnot, line 10]

Well, I gave notice to the porter’s lodge that I never would be “at home” to Mr. W—die, and would never be “out” to the Baron Humboldt. “Bien, bien, miladi,” said the porter, writing on his slate, and so I thought myself secure of the reception of the first man in the world in my opinion, and safe to

[*This foreboding was realised, for the man-bore actually did overtake us at the Pontine Marshes, whilst we were changing horses at the “Tre Taverne,” and I was talking to a monk who was going to Rome, the most agreeable man I ever met by chance.]

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escape the last man in the world that I ever wished to see. Well, my own servant being out, the *frotteur* entered this morning announcing Mons. Valdie! And complacently presenting me at the same time, with a little billet written in the lodge from M. Humboldt!* Here it is. “M. Humboldt toujours malheureaux.” After such a *contretemps*, one has nothing left to do but die, to retire into a convent! Paris abounds in these *enforceurs des portes*, as the great central place where bores from all regions most do congregate, every nation sending its contingent, but where I never met a *native* bore.

Mr. W.’s word on entering always was, “I come to beg you to introduce me to —,” and this was the prologue to a “swelling tale;” for it began with some French minister or English duchess, and ended with the Dog of Montargis, or some other animal celebrity, taking in its course all that was best worth knowing or desiring to know in Paris. One of his modes of procedure was to tread on somebody’s toes, than beg pardon, and ask permission to leave his card the following day! And this was a plagiarism from a certain Mr. “Toe” King, so called from this invention.

[*I made use of this incident in my novel of *The Princess* (1835), the perpetrator being “Lady O’Doherty.”]

p. 218 [Letter to Lady Clarke; Paris, 20 December 1818]

A Mr. W—die has introduced himself to us as an acquaintance of Mr. Hamilton Rowan’s, who would have given him a letter to us. Delighted to show attention to a friend of Mr. Rowan’s, I gave him *entrée* on Wednesdays, with which he seemed delighted, but he is a bore. Pray mention this to Mr. Rowan as soon as you can, and ask him if he knows such a gentleman.

25. John Waldie, Letter to Richard Bentley, 1859. Richard Bentley & Son, papers 1800-1936; Collection 830, box 2.

Waldie recalled meeting with Sir Charles and Lady Morgan in Paris at a musical concert hosted by Alexandre Boucher, where Waldie sang and afterwards had occasion to talk with the Morgans about their Dublin friends, Richard and Maria Waldie Griffith and the Hamilton Rowans. "They asked me to come on Wednesday Evenings when they are at home. She is little, squinting, and commonplace in appearance-- but yet rather good looking and very lively and animated" (XLII, 96; 13 December 1818). Upset by Lady Morgan's account of his behaviour, Waldie urged Bentley, in a second edition, to delete the uncomplimentary paragraphs and to insert the account he provided in this letter. He claimed that Lady Morgan was jealous of his social connections and his fluency in Italian. While there may well have been some truth in her accusations, it is probable that Lady Morgan was embarrassed by Waldie's reminders of her father's acting career and her own humble origins as daughter of an itinerant actor, and her early years as a governess before she became "Lady Morgan."

Directions to Mr. Bentley.
Begin at ^{page 205} line 10 with the word
"diary" - & leave out all page
206 except the 3 last lines. -

all contained in the above page
& half is false - Mr. W., then young
& active, was quick & agile, & not at
all likely to tread on people's toes.

I have an idea that I did
speak to Lady M. at a midday
halt on the Pontine marshes
in Novr 1819 - but I saw very
little of her during my winter
at Rome in 1819-20. I was
certainly not one of the Enforceurs
of Lady Morgan's portes, as I do
not remember calling on her
above once or twice in the
morning during ^{all} my winter in
Paris in 1819-20. -

Lady M. begins again with
me at line 14 of page 218 -
by saying "a Mr. Waldie has
introduced himself to us &c. Here

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all contained in the above page & half is false - Mr. W., then young & active, was quick & agile & not at all likely to tread on people's toes.

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it would be well to leave out
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She also knew from myself that
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occasion to desire Mr. ^{Rowan} Hamilton
to enquire about me.
My real crime was that all
the winter of 1818 & 19 in Paris
I regularly attended the Soirées
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His Duchesse is the eldest daughter
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 was nephew of Sir William Langham
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P.S.
Mr Waldie hopes Mr Bentley
will excuse his circumstantial
prolixity, & would be glad to
refer him to the Dukes
of Buccleuch & Roxburghe, &
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George Scott Douglas Bart, & Sir
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In 1817 at Rome Mr W. was
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with the young Louis Napoleon formed with every talent for his high destiny, & he afterwards when the Emperor was 20 saw a great deal of him at Rome in 1827-8 when he was residing with his most beautiful & talented mother in the Palazzo Ruspoli, & then inhabited by Conte de Goyon commanding the French Troops at Rome in 1856-7 when Mr W. last spent a winter at Rome. —


It may be well to mention that I have kept a regular diary of Time & occupation since I was only 13 years of age. The part of it relating to the winter in Paris in 1818-19 & to the summer of 1819 (passed entirely in Spain) was read by the late Mr Murray, who wished it to be published on account of our being the first travellers who went to Spain after the Peninsular War — but

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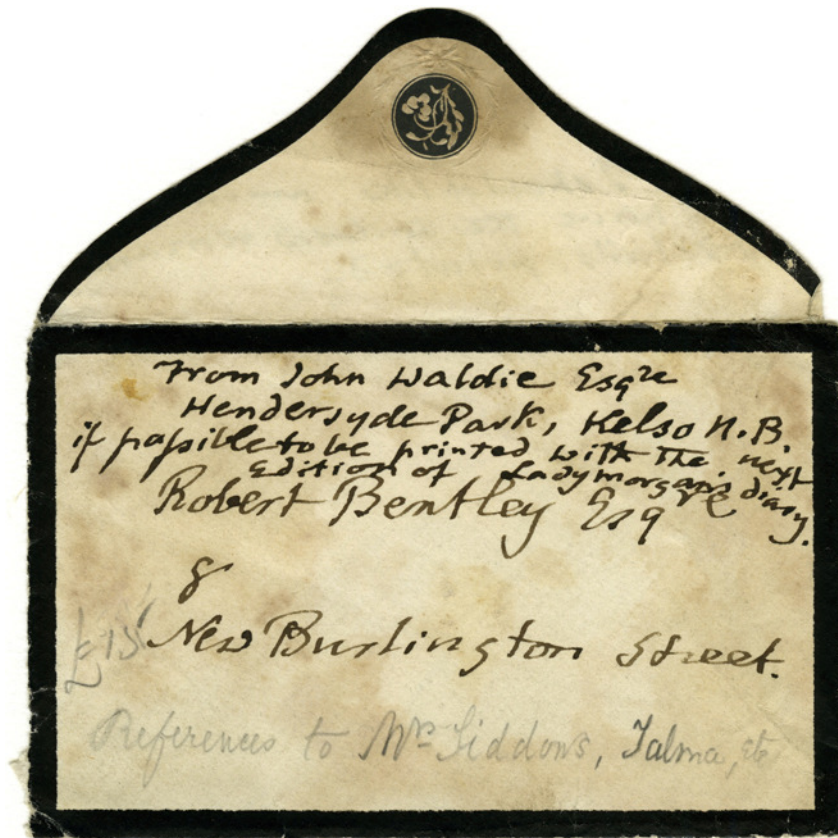


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[envelope front]

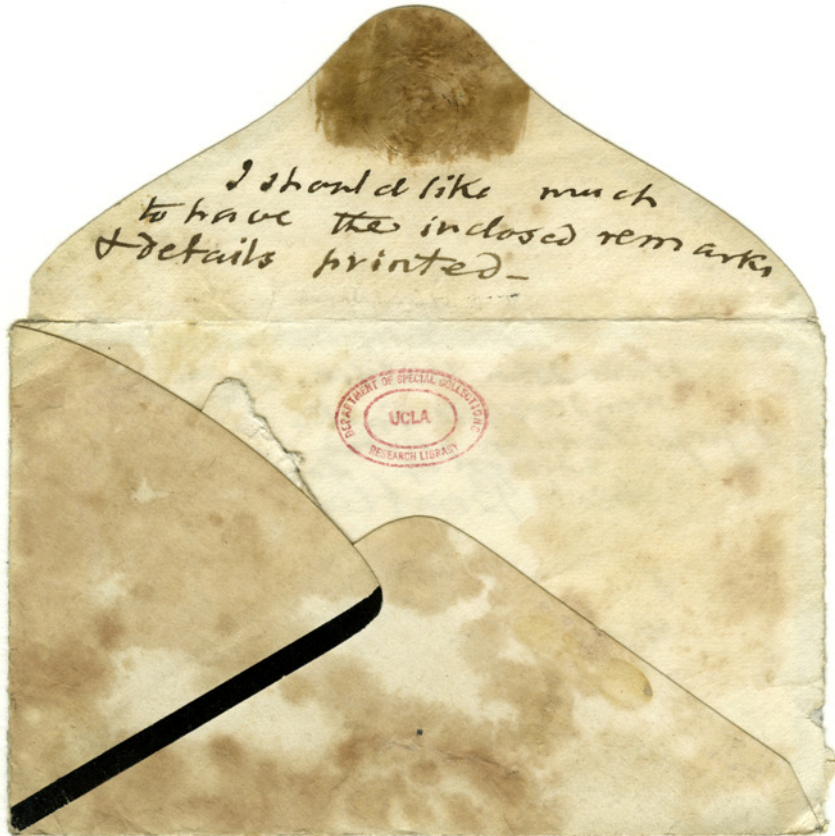
From John Waldie Esqr.

Hendersyde Park, Kelso

N.B. if possible to be printed with the next edition of Lady Morgan's diary.

Robert Bentley Esq.

8 New Burlington Street



[envelope back]

I should like much to have the inclosed remarks & details printed -