LADY MORGAN'S THE PRINCESS; OR, THE BEGUINE, A NOVEL OF POST-REVOLUTIONARY BELGIUM

Colin B. Atkinson
University of Windsor

In 1835 the Irish author Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan (1776-1859) published her novel of the Belgian Revolution, The Princess; or, The Beguine. The British reading public knew Lady Morgan's work and realized that it would be a serious--perhaps even radical--discussion of an important contemporary issue: the Belgian question. Although the revolt against the Dutch had occurred in 1830, the establishment of an independent state was still being debated in 1835, and the issue was not settled till 1839. The Princess was her ninth novel, but her work had been popular since her third, The Wild Irish Girl (1806), allowed her to change her profession from governess to author and brought her money, fame, and entrée into the powerful Whig society. Her biographer, Lionel Stevenson, called her

> the first successful woman author--the first to rise to social, intellectual and financial prestige entirely through her business-like exploitation of her literary talent.[1]

Her most active writing period was from 1800 to 1840, after which the partial loss of her sight slowed her down. From the first she was far more than a lady romancer, but especially after reading Corinne (1807) she enthusiastically accepted Madame de Staël's dictum that literature had "ceased to be a mere art; it had become a means to an end, a weapon in the service of the spirit of man."[2] Although her education, typical for a female, had been at best indifferent and her writing talents were limited, she was endowed with great energy and a determination to be

financially independent as well as influential. Like Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), she might have said, "I want to be doing something with the pen, since no other means of action in politics are in a woman's power."[3]

All her works were political, especially The Princess, whose purpose was to inform and influence the English. Her central character, a Member of Parliament, comments to some Belgians he has just met:

> The truth is, your Belgian revolution is not popular in England, or rather, not well known, and least of all with that large and influential party who are endeavoring to uphold a constitution.[4]

The period from 1800 to 1832 was a particularly political time in England, when

> no writer could avoid politics, in the narrower and broader senses of that word . . . almost every form of literary expression was given a political interpretation. . . . The political opinions of the authors of the time became fundamental phenomena in any consideration of their works.[5]

It is therefore no wonder that Lady Morgan, fiery Irish patriot and liberal champion of Catholic Emancipation and French Revolutionary ideas, would be attacked in Tory journals throughout her career.[6] On one occasion, in a scurrilous article of twenty-five pages by John Wilson Croker (the scourge of John Keats and Alfred Tennyson) which became famous, or infamous, she was accused of licentiousness and impiety, disloyalty and atheism. In short, he concluded, she was "a woman of violent and irrepressible passions."[7] In addition, she was a feminist--although the word would not be used in our sense until the turn of the century--and part of the objection to her was that she had left the narrow domestic realms allotted to the woman writer. When accused of having entered the area of politics, forbidden to women, she replied simply, "love of country is of no sex."[8]

Nor was love of liberty and the liberal ideals. She and her husband were among the first to visit France when it was again opened to British travelers after the Bourbon

Restoration. In her travel book France (1817) she was unreservedly pro-French, and not only in favour of the Revolution and its overthrow of monarchy, aristocracy, hierarchy, and church: she also made it plain that England had been treacherous to Napoleon after his surrender. The wrath of the Tories, who still shuddered in that hatred and fear of the French which the Revolution of 1789 had begun and the Irish Revolt (aided by the French) of 1798 had continued, helped the book do very well. Pausing only to pillory Croker in another Irish novel, in 1820 she and her husband set out to aid that "great cause, the regeneration of Italy"[9] with a similar book. Published in 1821, Italy was placed on the Index and its author forbidden to travel in the Papal States or the Habsburg Empire, a stronger reaction than the decree passed against her by the French government.[10]

Lady Morgan had hoped to write a similar political-historical-travel book on Belgium. This time her subject was a country which had freed itself from the unwanted masters thrust upon it by the Congress of Vienna, a country with, as she wrote, "the most liberal government in Europe" and a "people-chosen king," in fact, a nation "regenerated."[11] She and her husband spent much of 1833 in Belgium, talking to all sorts of people. Through her various friendships--she made friends wherever she went and never lost any--she met and talked with many in the new government. She dined at the palace with the new king and queen, and later gave a dinner, of which she wrote in her diary:

> We had last night nearly the whole of the last Provisional Government of the Belgian Revolution, with the additions of . . . the two De Brouckers, Henri et Charles, Quételet, the Royal Astronomer, Jullien, the Orator of the Opposition, Sir Robert Adair, our Ambassador, and the . . . La Tour Maubourgs [the French Ambassador and his wife].[12]

When she returned to Ireland late in 1833, she found that Mrs. Trollope, who had written a most successful travel book on the United States, was already working on a similar

one about Belgium, or as Lady Morgan put it in a letter, "Mrs. Trollope has got the start of me, has bivouacked on my ground."[13] But she would not waste the copious notes she had taken, her interviews, her preliminary historical reading, nor the research already done for a book on Belgian art. All of these she wove into The Princess, and though the book's "main intention was to interest the public in the new kingdom of Belgium, and to give a knowledge of the [Belgian] question and of the conditions that had led to it," the novel also serves as "a picturesque guide to Brussels" as well as to the rest of the country.[14]

Her major theme was Belgium's part in what Lady Morgan called "the great movement of the age, the mighty struggle for conquest between past and present. . . ."[15] She had, as usual, chosen a volatile political situation about which to write. The revolts of 1830 had frightened the great powers, and although Lord Palmerston had been successful in persuading Prussia, Austria, and Russia to accept the fact of the Belgian Revolution, the country's ultimate fate was still undecided.[16] The fear of France and the desire to contain her were almost as strong as they had been in 1815, when "an independent Belgium would have been thought . . . to have no chance of survival at all."[17] When the Belgians at first chose a son of King Louis-Philippe as their king. Palmerston was forced to use threats of armed intervention to change influential minds in both countries, while the three reactionary powers "waited for a misunderstanding between France and England to pounce on the small rebel kingdom,"[18] whose success set a dangerous example to their many subject countries. England, as the dominant liberal power, held Belgium's fate in her hands, and thus The Princess was not just the "sentimental education" of a Tory M.P., Sir Frederick Mottram, but was also the education of British public opinion and an introduction to Belgian art, history, and culture, which would lead to the recognition that these made a nation which had a right to exist as an independent state.[19]

Fig. 1 "Portrait of a Klop, Berber van Juckema," 1660, by Jan de Bray.

Kloppen, numerous in the 17th and 18th century, were unmarried women who lived a religious life without being nuns. They did not take perpetual vows, though they did take a temporary vow of poverty. After the Reformation they helped the Catholic priests with their clandestine work by teaching the children catechism, caring for church vestments, helping prepare for Mass, and carrying out household duties for the priests. Some had their own fortunes to draw on for support, but most had to earn their living by working as maidservants.

Fig. 2 "Portrait of a Beguine," 1635, by Pieter Fransz de Grebber.

Beguines were women who lived in a beguinage and lived a religious life without being cloistered nuns, though they wore a nun's habit. Like the kloppen they took only a single, temporary vow, that of poverty. Unlike the kloppen, beguines were not charged with the "care of souls," nor did they teach catechism. While kloppen outnumbered beguines in the 17th and 18th century, their numbers dwindled and they disappeared in the early 19th century, while the beguines remain active to the present day.

When the novel opens, Mottram, a wealthy, middle-aged, myopic politician, is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. His marriage to a duke's daughter was the "barter of rank for wealth," and his wife lives only for fashion and folly. His belief in Tory ideals has been growing weaker, and the combination of his disastrous marriage and a ghost from his past drives him suddenly, without plans, from England. He arrives in Ostend with neither passport nor money and is subjected to humiliating treatment. He is mortified "that there should be nothing in my appearance, or manner, to bear witness in my favour. Oh! how small a part of life and its vicissitudes is known to the prosperous and the rich!"[20]

Writing to a friend, he comments about the Belgian situation:

> I fancy that no spark of the 'glorious four days' has fallen upon the remote region of Ostend. I don't think that they have the least suspicion that they have changed kings and governments.[21]

Mottram has been living among a ruling class to whom the Belgian Revolution was a "farce," something that "won't work--can't go on at all."[22] The politicians and diplomats he knows are bored by and ignorant of the events, and no one knows or cares to know who even the new Belgian minister to England is. The stage is set for the education of the Tory M.P. While walking around Ostend, he meets an old man, a patriot, who tells him something of the history of the town, and then introduces him to a <u>blessé</u>, a young hero of the 26th of September, "our grand and glorious revolution." Mottram is taken aback. "Did the revolution of Brussels reach to Ostend?" he asks. The old man replies indignantly, "Reach it! we did not wait for that; we met it more than half-way." But Mottram's ignorance is not unexpected, for the old man goes on, "You English gentlemen believe nothing, know nothing, about us. I have talked to many of them, . . . and they were all alike ignorant on the subject."[23] The young man, who plainly is near death, adds:

> The cry of liberty, monsieur, had resounded through Belgium. It found no tardy echo in Flanders; for if nous autres Flamands are less explosive than the brave Liegeois, we were not less sensible of our grievances. . . . Our example was not followed, but met by the towns of the neighbourhood. Each made its own little revolution. Furnes, Nieuport, Ypres, Dixmude, Courtrai, and the major part of the communes of the plat pays, . . . Ce'était une belle révolution que la nôtre![24]

Mottram is touched by the young man's fate and the ardor of both patriots, and writing to his friend, he comments that he is beginning to feel a sympathy for the revolution, for "the wrong side!"[25]

When Mottram had previously visited Belgium, with his wife, they had traveled in a private carriage, visited only the largest cities, and known only the aristocracy. And he had been unutterably bored. This time, his travel carriage left behind in his haste, he is forced to use the treckschuyt, the public barges which plied the canals. And, as Lady Morgan comments:

> What information may be thus obtained of the state of a country (especially of a country still heaving with revolution), which books do not, newspapers will not, and tourists en poste, cannot, give![26]

Mottram is not bored this time; he observes his fellow passengers, listens when they speak French, even speaks to them. He makes friends with strangers who proudly tell him about their country, introduce him to their friends, and show him their cities. He learns of Belgian art and history, and most important, that the revolution of 1830 was part of a long tradition of rebellion against oppression. Thus, Ghent "in all ages of its history, . . . was famous for its struggles for independence,"[27] and in the old part of Brussels

> may still be found the sturdy spirit and firm nerve that resisted the splendid tyranny of the imperial Charles, the bloody persecutions of the bigot Philips, the numbing despotism and ill-judged innovations of the Austrian government and that has finally, in the present day, sent back the House of Orange to its native region, to which the interests of European nations should induce them to confine it.[28]

When the treckschuyt passes through the Franc de Bruges, a young Belgian comments, "It was here that the tree of liberty was planted and nourished in the fourteenth century" when the population fought both the Comtes de Flandres and the cities, and a fellow passenger adds, "Let us hope that the spirit of the ancient times is not extinct."[29] It becomes "very evident" that:

> The Flemings were desirous of impressing their English fellow-travellers with a conviction of the perfect success of their revolution and its consequences; and Sir Frederick Mottram was slowly yielding himself to a cause for which he had hitherto felt no interest.[30]

Instruction in art is used not only for general information, but also to emphasize the contention that Belgium's was a distinct and separate culture:

> There is a line of demarcation between all that is Dutch and Flemish, which neither Charles the Fifth in the sixteenth century, nor William of Nassau in the nineteenth, have been able to efface. We have nothing in common. Our schools of painting are as distinct as our national temperaments.[31]

The spiritualized beauty captured by Vandyke and Gabriel Metz, for example, is contrasted with the wordly realism of Paul Potter or Rembrandt, and this Flemish tradition goes back to the Van Eycks and Hemling [Memling]. The Dutch stayed at home; the Flemish travelled, especially to Italy. In fact, Flemish art has more in common with Italian than with Dutch.

The Belgian Revolution is seen in its European context as Mottram (and the reader) is reminded that other revolts of 1830 failed: on the treckschuyt he finds a book, Le Mie Prigioni (1832), the prison memoirs of a real Italian patriot, Silvio Pellico, who had been sentenced to hard labour.[32] Lady Morgan makes him the youthful and almost forgotten friend of her hero. Later, in Ghent, he meets "one of those splendid fragments of Polish heroism . . . whose spirit the Russian autocrat has found it impossible to bend, to break, or to extinguish."[33] Learning from his new acquaintance of the oppression under which the Poles

live, Mottram becomes indignant, and he who "had been guided . . . by the opinions of men who held a dinner at the Russian Embassy of greater importance than the liberties of mankind," now finds himself defending the Poles, "to whose virtues he had been hitherto as insensible as incredulous."[34] And hearing a Polish hymn to liberty some time after this, he extends his sympathies to "the liberation of classic Italy and of honest Germany," who like the Poles are "victims of the despotism still . . . flourishing."[35]

His mind and emotions awakened, he is increasingly able to comprehend and sympathize with not only liberal revolutionaries and republicans but also with other human beings hitherto outside his narrow world. He looks afresh at his Irish servant, formerly a stable groom, and rather unreliable and feckless:

> For the first time in his life, the haughty master of many servants was led to acknowledge their possible individuality. Accustomed to regard his domestics as machines mounted upon certain principles for his service, he had overlooked their moral characters as men; nor ever reflected that the inconveniences incidental to their administration, their follies, vices, and infidelities, were in part the consequences of that total absence of sympathy and communion with which English masters treated their domestics.[36]

This comment of Lady Morgan, of course, also refers to the relationship between England and Ireland, never far from her mind.

Mottram feels this change in himself, this "breadth of mind, expansion of ideas, boldness of inquiry, which he never before had time, independence or courage to indulge,"[37] as a reawakening of his youth, and the moroseness and despair which had sent him so hastily, even desperately, abroad, is gone. And though

> He was scarcely less a Tory, and by no means more a Whig . . . he was already taking more European views; his mind was ascending from particulars to generals, and he was assigning to by-gone ages those by-gone terms and usages which are no longer applicable to the present, an epoch without an antecedent! His mind resembled a compressive spring set free.[38]

He makes friends with a young man in a peasant's blouse whom he meets in an art gallery. The blue blouse, first met on the blessé at Ostend, had been adopted as the revolutionary costume. He recommends it to Mottram as "light, loose, and clean; and above all, popular beyond expression," and proceeds to tell its history from medieval days to its role in 1830. Mottram thinks it has an "extremely liberty-and-equality air,"[39] and his own adoption of it perhaps symbolizes his acceptance of the Revolution and of what it has given him: the curative powers of knowing the "hopeless impracticability of the system of conservatism, in the face of a spirit of change."[40] Like Belgium, Mottram has been regenerated, has thrown off old and oppressive masters.

The young man in the blouse was, in the book as well as in reality, a M. Van Hallan, an author Lady Morgan admired. He had been at her dinner table in Brussels, and in her diary she commented:

> He is the type of the character and national feelings of the Belgian youth, and one among the many illustrations of the beneficial change in the character of a people effected by the removal of oppressive and anti-national institutions.[41]

Van Hallan reappears in Brussels, just before the third anniversary of the Four Days. Meeting Mottram, who has slipped away from his tedious English friends who were on their way to the theatre to see Muette de Portici, he tells him of the first part of the Revolution.

Lady Morgan's narration of the events of the Four Days is told in several parts and from various points of view. Like Mottram, the reader has gradually become acquainted with the reasons for the revolution and various events all over Belgium. Then we are given a brief synopsis of the Four Days in a letter written by one of the English dilettante diplomats, whose tone is flippant and sarcastic, and who is primarily concerned with the lack of "society" in Brussels: "the place is absolutely in the hands of the canaille: but this cannot last."[42] Van Hallan recounts the beginning in

detail, and the major narrative takes place the next day, at the home of M. Jensens, a lace merchant and Flemish nationalist, who himself had been in the fighting. At this point, the reader, like Mottram, is sympathetic to the Belgian thirst for freedom and national identity, and Lady Morgan dramatizes her history as Jensens and his son recount their adventure and stress the unanimity of the people of Brussels in the fight against the Dutch. We hear the final details at the celebration of the third anniversary. We also read the comment of the English aristocrats whose utter insensitivity to the desires of the Belgians and whose mindless allusions to the "dear" House of Orange show how far Mottram has changed. He writes to his friend, the one to whom he had commented that the citizens of Ostend would not even know there had been a revolution:

> these lovely valleys, these fruitful plains, peopled by a mild and industrious race, have for ages been the battle-field where the despots of Europe have met to vent their ferocious passions and to spread desolation on the soil that lay in the way of their mad ambition. There is scarcely a nation of the great civilized commonwealth which has not a long account of wrong to settle with this devoted country, that cries for reparation; and if the diplomacy which is now at work shall establish for Belgium centuries of peace and of industry . . . it will only discharge a small part of its long-accumulating debt. I am surprised that this has never before struck me. You will say that I am coming round to your opinions: but it is one thing to read of victories in gazettes; another to come into personal contact with the humanity they afflict.[43]

He is sent home to England to bring his "restored health," his "renovated mind, to bear on subjects of vital importance. . . . Every step, from the capital of free, young Belgium, to the capitals of prostrate Germany, will offer facts for investigation."[44] And the book ends with a two-page essay praising post-revolutionary Belgium.

But what of those staples of fiction: love and romance? Lady Morgan did include them, but they were always, in every novel, subordinated, even used, for her own purposes. She would unite Protestant and Catholic, English and Irish,

patriots of both sexes, as symbols or pleas for tolerance and emancipation. Her books never actually end with a marriage, and in The Princess, there is no marriage at all. There is romance, because guiding and influencing Mottram at every turn there are several mysterious, ubiquitous women: one a well-known Belgian artist, a Madame Marguerite; another is the Princess of Schauffenhausen, a wealthy aristocrat; and the third is an elderly Flemish Beguine, Soeur Greite. They all turn out to be the same woman, which rather strains credulity. But then all her heroines are multi-talented, strong, and determined women, like herself. And they are usually in a position achieved by their own efforts in which they are not subordinated to men, again as she herself was.

Wherever Lady Morgan went, she studied women, and in Belgium she was taken to the home of

> Fannie Corr, the young Belgian artist. [Charles] Rogier, the Minister of the Interior, carried me off one morning to see an old delabrée house--pretty much as I have described it [in The Princess]--and as we waited for the young struggling artiste in her studio, I was struck by its dreariness and picturesque desolation.[45]

Her artist, Madame Marguerite, has worked long to achieve her success and respected position, and she is independent almost to the point of rudeness. When in the novel M. Rogier, that same Minister of the Interior, offers his arm to her, she replies:

> 'No . . . I have gone through life without an arm to lean on; and I will not now risk my independence, by taking the arm of a minister of state, even though he be le plus aimable de tous les ministres possibles.' She bowed and retired.[46]

Writing to Mottram to reject financial assistance, she says, "I am as wealthy as yourself; for my means are equal to, and even beyond, my wishes. They are within myself, a faculty which the world can neither give nor take away."[47]

Lady Morgan's women are never the timid recipients of male admiration and courtship, but are active, hard-working, often not terribly young--Madame Marguerite is thirty-five--heroines who either earn their own living (in later novels)

or are unable to do so because of an improper education. Only Lady Morgan would have commented on the fiancée of the blessé at Ostend that she was apprenticed to a lace maker and would have "her own industry to support her," or describe a princess as having among her accomplishments one by which she could, if necessary, earn her own bread.[48]

In addition to the studio of Fannie Corr, the Beguines served as inspiration for the novel.[49] Lady Morgan had certainly studied their history, and as Mottram visits beguinages in Ghent and Brussels, the history of the movement is given. She found it "altogether Belgian"[50] and "feminist"--

> Other orders rose and fell in the long interval of eleven hundred years; but female sensibility preserved what female sensibility had created [she credited Beghe, the daughter of Pepin of Landon, with the foundation]; and the Beguines of Brussels, Ghent, and Bruges, renowned through successive ages of warfare and civil commotion for the ministering charity of the sisterhood, were suffered to exist even by . . . the French Revolution.[51]

Beguines earned their own living, when they did not have private means; took no permanent vows, just a temporary vow of chastity in force only while they remained in the order; could leave whenever they wished; and performed charitable duties which varied with the needs of the communities in which they lived.[52] Nursing the sick was the most usual, and the only one which Lady Morgan includes. Thus, Mottram is told by a native of Ghent, "Nobody here can be ill without a Beguine to nurse him; there would be neither recovering . . . nor dying in odour of sanctity without their assistance."[53] Their vocation, as she put it, was "with the world."[54] Madame Marguerite is taken care of in childhood by the order, has been a Beguine at one time, and returns to the order at the end of the book. All of the various personae of the heroine are or were Beguines, and Beguinages and sisters on their way somewhere are found throughout the novel. It was obviously their independence which appealed to Lady Morgan.

The Beguines' contribution to the Revolution is narrated. As the old woman who guards Madame Marguerite's studio tells Mottram, "Ah, Monsieur, if you knew to what danger the good sisters exposed themselves during the Four Days!"[55] There are various mentions throughout the novel of their work nursing the wounded, as well as a footnote quoting from a history of the Revolution:

> Le bel établissement du Grand Béguinage fut disposé pour recevoir et secourir les victimes des combats.[56]

Not only did Lady Morgan often document items she felt might be questioned, she also on occasion flung extra bits of information at the reader through footnotes!

The Beguines were not the only women active in the Revolution, as the author makes clear. A patriotic young Brugeois informs Mottram that "The first rebuff which William got on his interference with our language was from the witty and patriotic Madame de H------,"[57] and when the Four Days are recounted at the home of the Jensens, Madame Marguerite begins the discussion by commenting:

> We women of Brussels were not idle during the Four Days, may we not take our <u>eau de groseille</u> [a toast is being drunk] to the same tune and time to which you, messieurs quaff your chateau Margot? Which of you gentlemen performed more service than Madame Jensens and her daughters, when they received the wounded in their own house, and attended the whole time at the hospitals?[58]

We had been informed earlier that the artist was herself similarly active nursing the wounded. The Jensens' son cries out, "Bravo, Madame Marguerite! you are in the right," while the women blush with pleasure.[59] And lest anyone doubt that women contributed, there is a lengthy footnote.[60]

But like rebellion against oppression, the active participation of women in Belgian history, art, and culture is not new. Lady Morgan took every opportunity, as she had done since first writing a novel, to acquaint the reader with women's contributions, which she felt were generally neglected, ignored, or deprecated by male historians.[61] No sovereign

is mentioned without his consort being included equally.[62] The mothers of great men are given their due, as, for example, when Jensens is speaking of Vandyke:

> Vandyke's mother was a celebrated beauty and artist; from her he received both his genius and his good looks; and from her he had his earliest impressions of art, and first lessons.[63]

Indeed, the contributions of women to history are discussed with no sense of being dragged in--they are there as are the contributions of men. A typical passage is this part of a conversation with M. Gachard, the "learned archivist" of the Dépôt des Archives:

> This [chamber] is the dépôt of the archives of the chambre des comptes de Flandre, an institution founded by Philip the Bold in 1383; and here, we approach the frontiers of modern diplomacy, the archives of the conseil d'état, dating from the reign of Charles the Fifth. 'Tis from this collection that the Austrian government carried off the correspondence of that emperor with the Duchess Marguerite his aunt, and with Mary his sister, who governed the Low Countries from 1522 to 1555; and the correspondence of Marguerite with Ferdinand King of the Romans. It is from this dépôt, too, that we have supplied the correspondence of Marguerite of Parma with Gérard de Groisbeck, to the pages of the Analectes Belgiques. But, precious above all its treasures, it contains the materials for the history of that Marguerite des Marguerites, the Duchess Marguerite of Austria, the aunt, guardian, and governess of Charles the Fifth,--the most able and brilliant of our female sovereigns.[64]

Nor are women artists ignored; in a conversation with Mottram, Madame Marguerite says:

> We have produced many eminent women in the arts. To begin with Marguerite Van Eyke, the sister of Hubert and John. She cultivated her art with such devotion, that she made a vow to St. Beghe, . . . never to marry.[65]

Other women artists such as Rosalba Carierra and Angelica Kauffman are also mentioned. When the Polish patriot tells of his country's struggle, he recounts as well the participation of his mother and other "female relations," and Mottram later learns that the Pole is

> the head of one of the noblest families of Poland, by descent, by patriotism, and by valour; of a family, too, illustrated by the glorious devotion of a woman. The heroic deeds of the Countess P., his kinswoman, will shed a glow upon the history of her country, which not all the power of Russia can cloud or conceal from posterity![66]

As Madame Marguerite, the conduit for Lady Morgan's ideas, says:

> The influence of woman was, is, and ever will be exercised directly or indirectly, in good or in evil! It is a part of the scheme of nature.[67]

Indeed, Madame Marguerite herself illustrates this influence in The Princess. Though Mottram falls in love with her and asks her to be his mistress, she not only rejects him, but makes it plain that her interest in him has been not romance but the wish to bring about his education, change and growth in order to serve her country. He feels she has thrown herself at him:

> You cannot suppose that I am such a dolt as to believe that you have done this, all this, in a spirit of fanatical liberalism, to work a political conversion, and bring over one proselyte to a cause in which you can have no interest beyond that of abstract opinion?

She answers "spiritedly":

> Why not? What have not women done for religious proselytism! what are they not doing every day! what oceans have they not been tossed on! what distant regions have they not traversed! what deserts have they not perished in!

But he feels religion is another thing, not understanding her idea that politics has become a religion. She replies:

> Is that great faith which concerns entire humanity, the greatest happiness of society itself, to have no female advocate? Is the moral, social, and political elevation of the species mere opinion, ever to be discussed, and never acted on?

And the cause is not "abstract opinion," but "the country of my accidental birth and free selection."[68] And she sends him back to his own country to help in its needed regeneration, to continue its reforms.

It must be asked how accurate and how fair Lady Morgan's picture of the Belgian Revolution is. As a devoted liberal, a fighter whose "books were battles" and who was "less a woman of the pen than a patriot and a partizan,"[69] as the Anthenaeum put it shortly before her death, she seldom gave much time to opposing views. Mottram is exposed to the Orangeists on one occasion, but their opinions, while not derided, are not too convincingly presented.[70] But given her liberal bias, coloured as it was by her devotion to Ireland, her picture agrees in general with that of a contemporary historian, Charles White, author of The Belgic [sic] Revolution (1835),[71] whom she may have known. He had lived in Belgium for more than four years, beginning before 1830, and had "been on terms of amicable intercourse with many of the most eminent personages that have figured on the political horizon."[72] Like Lady Morgan, he was a liberal. Her picture also agrees with that of a modern historian, E. H. Kossmann, author of The Low Countries 1780-1940.[73] Geraldine Jewsbury, who helped her edit her memoirs and who knew her well, wrote that "the characters are all drawn from the life, and would be easily recognizable by anyone conversant with the men and women of the time. . . . The chief personages of the revolution are historical portraits of great force and spirit."[74] Further, a reading of only a few of her novels shows that she was at heart an historian. In fact The Princess, though originally conceived as a travel book, was begun as a history and only later turned into a novel. But it is doubtful if she considered becoming an historian, as she wrote to earn money primarily, and fiction paid considerably better. But in the days before public libraries and other scholarly amenities, Lady Morgan went to great lengths in her search for facts and desire for accuracy, and had done so from the beginning of her career. For her earlier travel books, France and Italy, she had talked to laundresses and maids as well as to Duchesses, and we may be virtually certain that the incidents she describes which cannot be found in contemporary writings came from her own conversations.

Her major purpose was to influence and educate British public opinion about Belgium so that its independence would be assured. How successful was she in this? Although it is impossible, without a direct mention by someone like Lord Palmerston, to know for certain, yet what is known makes it likely that The Princess exerted some influence. She would never have been the subject of such vituperative attacks for so long had she not written politically important books.[75] Her work for the most part sold very well for the time--she lived well and left fifteen thousand pounds of her own money to her nieces, her husband's going to his daughter by a previous marriage--she was considered to be of sufficient political importance to be watched by the Italian police while in Italy, and her influence on Irish history as well as literature is generally accepted. Finally, in 1837 she was awarded the considerable sum of £300 a year, the first pension given to a woman in England for literary services, by the Whig government, which two years later was able to settle the Belgian question by assuring that country of an independent existence.

Endnotes

[1]Lionel Stevenson, The Wild Irish Girl, The Life of Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan (London: Chapman & Hall, 1936), Preface, n.p.

[2]J. Christopher Herold, Mistress to an Age: A Life of Madame de Staël (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962 [orig. 1958]), p. 193.

[3]R. K. Webb, Harriet Martineau, Radical Victorian (1960), p. 114, from Ellen Moers, Literary Women (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), p. 125.

[4]The Princess; or, The Beguine (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1835), p. 351.

[5]Myron F. Brightfield, John Wilson Croker (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1940), p. 262.

[6]"Their house on Kildare Street gradually became Dublin's most powerful literary salon, and a center of political activity." Thomas Flanagan, The Irish Novelists 1800-1850 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 125. See also Walter Graham, Tory Criticism in the Quarterly Review 1809-1853 (New York: AMS Press, 1970 [orig. 1921]), p. 39.

[7]Stevenson, p. 191 and p. 189.

[8]The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys: A National Tale (London: Henry Colburn, 1827), Preface, n.p.

[9]Letter to her sister, Passages from My Autobiography (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1859), Vol. I, p. 212.

[10]Stevenson, p. 230.

[11]The Princess, pp. 305, 171.

[12]Lady Morgan's Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries and Correspondence (London: William H. Allen & Company, 1863), ed. W. Hepworth Dixon, Vol. II, p. 373.

[13]Stevenson, p. 287. Mrs. Trollope's Belgium and Western Germany in 1833 was published by John Murray in 1834. The two books would not have been similar; Mrs. Trollope was very much a Tory, and commented, "no one, I believe, could pass a month in Belgium, and converse as freely with the people of all parties as I did, without becoming aware that the King of Holland still reigns in the hearts of the majority; and that any person, however illustrious, who had become the instrument of the factious demagogues employed to dismember his kingdom, could have little chance of retaining his station were the genuine wishes of the Belgians themselves consulted." From p. 37 of the American edition (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1834). Only a few pages of her book are concerned with the political situation.

[14]Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 386-7.

[15]Princess, p. 137.

[16]See Jasper Ridley, Lord Palmerston (London: Constable & Co., 1970), pp. 122-137, for an excellent discussion on the "Belgian Crisis."

[17]L. C. B. Seaman, From Vienna to Versailles (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1970 [orig. 1955]), p. 4.

[18]G. M. Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century and After, 1782-1919 (New York: Harper & Row, 1966 [orig. 1937]), p. 234.

[19]This was a very new attitude; Palmerston, like the other statesmen of his time, "believed that the . . . frontiers of Belgium [should be drawn] in accordance with the stragegic interests of the great powers with a view to preventing a European war; such questions as ethnic or language affinities, or the wishes of the inhabitants of a region, were of no importance." Nor were the "national aspirations of subject peoples, or the right to self-determination, which came to be accepted as a desirable objective in the twentieth century." Lord Palmerston, p. 127.

[20]Princess, p. 92.

[21]Ibid., p. 93.

[22]Ibid., pp. 17, 18.

[23] Ibid., p. 117.

[24] Ibid., p. 118.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 158.

[27] Ibid., p. 175.

[28] Ibid., p. 226.

[29] Ibid., p. 132.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., p. 261; see also pp. 182-3.

[32] Pellico was the author, among other books, of Francesca da Rimini, which was translated into English by Lord Byron.

[33] Ibid., p. 171.

[34] Ibid., p. 172.

[35] Ibid., pp. 328-9.

[36] Ibid., p. 147.

[37] Ibid., p. 227.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., pp. 203-4.

[40] Ibid., p. 173.

[41] Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 373, and almost verbatim in Princess, p. 204.

[42] Princess, p. 207.

[43] Ibid., p. 393.

[44]Ibid., p. 355.

[45]Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 383.

[46]Princess, p. 309.

[47]Ibid., p. 355.

[48]Ibid., p. 27. She urged that all girls be given some kind of training so that they could, if necessary, earn their own living.

[49]Most of the articles and books on the Beguines are on the Medieval Period (see, for example, in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Vol. I, pp. 1341-52, the Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Vol. II, pp. 528-35, and shorter articles in the Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion, and the New Catholic Encyclopedia. The standard book is Ernest B. McDonnell, The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture (New York: Octagon Books, 1969 [orig. 1954]). Edith Cowell, an English Beguine, wrote an article called "The Beguinage Movement," The Catholic World CXXIX No. 831 (June 1934): 306-13.

[50]Edith Cowell wrote that "we may further agree that if it [the Beguine movement] (probably) had its rise in the country we now call Belgium, it was because a tendency toward religious and social cooperation has always been marked characteristic of the Flemish people," p. 31.

[51]Princess, p. 196; see also pp. 251-2. Modern scholarship does not accept St. Beghe as the founder of the order, but it was accepted in Lady Morgan's time.

[52]Cowell, p. 312.

[53]Princess, p. 167.

[54]Ibid., p. 198.

[55]Ibid., p. 230.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid., p. 153.

[58]Ibid., p. 271.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., p. 232. "Pendant la bataille, un grand nombre de propriétaires de maisons, aidés de leurs familles, arrachaient le plomb de leurs toits pour en faire des balles, et travaillaient sans relâche à confectionner des cartouches quand ils pouvaient se procurer de la poudre. Les femmes, les dames même se trouvaient avec courage et persévérance à ces occupations si nouvelles pour elles. Dès le 28 septembre, un grand nombre de ces dames se réunirent en société, sous la présidence du general en chef Van Halen, dans le but de secourir les blessés et leurs familles. Des collectes furent faites par leurs soins dans toutes les églises, elles se partagèrent la tâche douloureuse de visiter chaque jour les ambulances, accompagnées d'un aide-de-camp. Le vin trouvé dans les caves des palais fut mis à leur disposition." Supplément aux Esquisses Historiques de la Première Epoque de la Révolution de la Belgique en 1830. See also Comtesse de Meeus, "The Belgian Revolution of 1830," The Catholic World CXXXIV, No. 803 (February 1932):550.

[61] In 1840 Lady Morgan published Woman and Her Master which was an exploration of woman's influence, ignored or maligned by historians in the past, in the ancient world. She had intended to publish another volume, bringing the book up to her own times, but her eyesight failed her and she was unable to do the research.

[62] Princess, pp. 128, 144, 178, 317.

[63] Ibid., p. 264.

[64] Ibid., p. 305.

[65] Ibid., p. 187.

[66] Ibid., p. 338.

[67] Ibid., p. 316.

[68] Ibid., p. 347.

[69] Review of Passages from My Autobiography, Athenaeum (25 January 1859):73.

[70] Princess, pp. 161-3.

[71]Published in London by Whittaker and Co., in two volumes.

[72]Belgic [sic] Revolution, "Preface," p. 7.

[73]Oxford University Press: London, 1978.

[74]Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 386.

[75]Irish Novelists, pp. 126-8.