

# HISTORIA INCOGNITA

RESEARCHING AND WRITING FORGOTTEN HISTORIES

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## THE JOURNAL OF MADAME CALLEGARI

**WHO WAS MADAME CALLEGARI?**

'Douglas Wilkie has followed the paper trail left behind by this shape-changing adventurer with a flair for language and a sense of herself as the heroine in her own romance. Having tracked the stylish swindler through the archives of eight countries, he weaves together a meticulously researched account of an unexpected and utterly fascinating woman.'

*Emeritus Professor Lucy Frost, The University of Tasmania*

'After four years of meticulous research ... Douglas Wilkie has chosen to tell this fascinating story in the first voice, that of Madame Callegari herself ... intriguing and well-told, from the wretchedness of prison and transportation ... to their remarkable travels and sojourns in parts of the world rarely visited by a nineteenth century woman ... He is to be congratulated on his achievement.'

*Elaine Lewis, Author Left Bank Waltz, (Vintage 2006)  
Co-editor The French Australian Review.*

'Astute readers ... will no doubt be delighted to now be able to read the full story of Madame Callegari and her incredible life ... a valuable and important contribution to the literature in the area of French-Australian Studies, given the time that Madame Callegari spent here and in the surrounding region. Readers everywhere can be very grateful that Douglas Wilkie came across Madame Callegari's true identity, that he has set the record straight, and that he has shared her fascinating story with us.'

*Dr Kerry Mullan, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator French Studies,  
RMIT University Melbourne*

Madame Callegari's true adventures go far beyond those recorded by Alexandre Dumas in 1855. Yes, she visited all of the places described by Dumas – Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, the Marquesas Islands, New Caledonia, Hawaii, California, and Mexico – but she also became involved in the Mexican civil war with President Santa Anna; she and her husband were granted a vast hacienda on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; they came under attack by rebel troops who destroyed their farm; she witnessed American corruption on the Isthmus and reported it to President Ulysses S Grant; she was witness to great battles during the American Civil War and witnessed the siege of New Orleans. Eventually, late in life she tried to have published a sequel to her 1855 journal, but negotiations failed and her goal was not achieved.

Now, for the first time we can read the story of Madame Callegari – the true story behind Alexandre Dumas's 1855 *Journal of Madame Giovanni*.

**DOUGLAS WILKIE**

**The JOURNAL of MADAME CALLEGARI**

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Who was Madame Callegari? Was she one of these?

*The Transported Convict*

*The Venetian Merchant's Wife*

*The Heroine of the Californian Goldrushes*

*The Adventurer of the Mexican Jungles*

*The Celebrity of European Literary Circles*

*The Plantation Owner of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec*

No. Madame Callegari was not just one of these. In fact, she was all of these.

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Early in 1855, a thirty-six-year-old French woman approached Alexandre Dumas in Paris, and asked him to edit, and publish, her account of ten years spent travelling in Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, California and Mexico. Dumas agreed to her request, because her story was one of adventure and romance, and took this young lady, and her husband, to places seldom visited by young women. However,

she insisted that, in publishing her story, her true identity should not be revealed. To achieve this they chose the pseudonym Madame Giovanni, and changed, or omitted, certain parts of the narrative which could have identified her.

Since first publication, the true identity of Madame Giovanni was cause for speculation, and readers could not decide whether the story was true at all, or whether it was a mixture of fact and fiction. The *Journal of Madame Callegari*, researched over four years, and using archives from at least eight countries, reveals that Madame Marie Giovanni was in fact Madame Marie Callegari.

Madame Callegari's true adventures go far beyond those recorded by Alexandre Dumas in 1855. Yes, she visited all of the places described by Dumas—Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, the Marquesas Islands, New Caledonia, Hawaii, California, and Mexico—but she also became involved in the Mexican civil war with President Santa Anna; she and her husband were granted a vast *hacienda* on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; they came under attack by rebel troops who destroyed their farm; she witnessed American corruption on the Isthmus and reported it to President Ulysses S Grant; she was witness to great battles during the American Civil War and witnessed the siege of New Orleans. Eventually, late in life she tried to have published a sequel to her 1855 journal, but negotiations failed and her goal was not achieved.

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## REVIEWS OF THIS BOOK

“*The Journal of Madame Callegari* ... is a fascinating story from start to finish: not only the very notion that the true identity of Madame Callegari has remained hidden until now, but also the incredible story of Madame Callegari's life and travels. ... the author's choice to write the journal in the first person adds greatly to the pace and personal nature of the story and draws the reader in from the very beginning.

We are immediately taken into Madame Callegari's confidence as she starts to narrate her adventures and confides in us that there were several errors in the original journal by Alexandre Dumas. We are subsequently introduced to Madame Callegari as Louise Mirabello in a courtroom. (This will be the first of many variations on her true identity.) The descriptive passages in those early scenes bring the characters to life and we are as equally impressed by Madame Callegari's well-to-do acquaintances (who include Napoléon Bonaparte's niece and Émile de Girardin), as we are by our heroine's improbable adventures which will lead her and her future husband to Australia.

Astute readers ... will no doubt be delighted to now be able to read the full story of Madame Callegari and her incredible life. This complete account is meticulously researched and a valuable and important contribution to the literature in the area of French-Australian Studies, given the time that Madame Callegari spent here and in the surrounding region. Readers everywhere can be very grateful that Douglas

Wilkie came across Madame Callegari's true identity, that he has set the record straight, and that he has shared her fascinating story with us."

*Dr Kerry Mullan, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator French Studies, RMIT University*

"The Governor of London's Coldbath Fields House of Correction remembered his young French prisoner as 'a treacherous, bad woman'. Though 'by no means handsome', she possessed a 'very high talent, remarkable for eloquence and tears'. Three decades later the same woman, now with an Italian name, introduced herself by letter to the American president Ulysses S. Grant, saying she was returning to Europe as a 'traveler who certainly will be believed'. When Alexandre Dumas published in Paris the journal of her earlier travels, he may or may not have 'believed' her, but as one of the most famous writers of his day, he had an eye for a good story and hers was a dramatic tale of adventure and romance across continents and overseas. Douglas Wilkie has followed the paper trail left behind by this shape-changing adventurer with a flair for language and a sense of herself as the heroine in her own romance. Having tracked the stylish swindler through the archives of eight countries, he weaves together a meticulously researched account of an unexpected and utterly fascinating woman."

*Emeritus Professor Lucy Frost, The University of Tasmania*

"After four years of meticulous research during which he was able to trace her movements around the world, Wilkie was able to reveal that Madame Marie Giovanni was certainly Madame Marie Callegari, a real woman who had visited most of the places described in Dumas' book. ... Douglas Wilkie has chosen to tell this fascinating story in the first voice, that of Madame Callegari herself, so we find her writing posthumously, telling why she chose to publish under a pseudonym and introducing us to her former self, the young woman known as Louisa La Grange ... intriguing and well-told, from the wretchedness of prison and transportation followed by a pardon in Australia and then marriage to fellow-convict, the Venetian merchant Pietro Callegari, to their remarkable travels and sojourns in parts of the world rarely visited by a nineteenth century woman. ... The original Dumas journal is written in the first person but here we find the voice enhanced with detailed facts and insights, drawn from Wilkie's meticulous research. This remarkable attention to detail successfully draws the reader deeper into Madame Giovanni's story, thus dissipating any initial unease; the end-notes are crucial as evidence of Madame Callegari's claims. Wilkie writes 'The Journal of Madame Callegari is what I believe Madame Callegari would have told us if she had the opportunity.' He is to be congratulated on his achievement."

*Elaine Lewis, Author Left Bank Waltz, (Vintage 2006); Co-editor The French Australian Review.*

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**PURCHASE THIS BOOK**

*The Journal of Madame Callegari* can be purchased through the links on the Historia Incognita website.