

The Exiled Insider: The Ambivalent Reception of Maria Graham's *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* (1824)

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Abstract

Maria Graham (Liverpool, 1785 - London, 1842) was one of the few female writers whose travel writings were published in Europe with relative success among the public. This article will focus on two aspects of her *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil*, published in England in 1824 after Graham lived twice in Brazil during its independence process: first, the way the diary reflects many of the paradoxes, contradictions, and multifaceted perspectives of the life and work of Maria Graham; and, second, the equally paradoxical reception of European critics. Ultimately, this text intends to analyze how the ambivalent reception mirrors a type of rhetoric that, in order to survive and avoid censorship in view of the difficult political context, relies precisely on ambivalence.

Keywords

Maria Graham, Travel Writing, Brazil, Longman, England, Female Writing, Dom Pedro, independence, slavery

Resumo

Maria Graham (Liverpool, 1785 - Londres, 1842) foi uma das poucas escritoras femininas cuja escrita de viagens foi publicada na Europa com relativo sucesso entre o público leitor. Este texto centrar-se-á em dois aspectos de análise a partir de seu diário *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil*, publicado na Inglaterra em 1824 depois de duas estadias no Brasil durante a época da independência: primeiramente, a maneira como o diário reflecte muitos dos paradoxos, contradições e perspectivas múltiplas na vida e obra da Maria Graham; e por outro lado a recepção igualmente paradoxal por parte da crítica europeia. Afinal, este texto pretende analisar o modo como a ambivalência na recepção espelha uma retórica que, para existir e evitar ser definitivamente censurada perante a difícil situação política, tem de valer-se precisamente da ambivalência.

Palavras-chave

Maria Graham, Escrita de Viagens, Brasil, Longman, Inglaterra, escrita feminina, Dom Pedro, independência, escravatura

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Tracing the steps of Maria Graham (Liverpool, 1785 - London, 1842)—née Maria Dundas and later known as Lady Maria Calcott—is, beyond the mere plurality of last names, an effort of going after a multifaceted character. Her *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* (1824), which will be the main focus of this study, draws attention to different levels of multiplicity and contradiction that mirror some of her lifelong paradoxes. Accordingly, the reception of this journal is problematic because in no way can it be considered uniform. Thus, the perplexity of British reviewers who both praised and rejected Maria Graham's book mirrors the paradoxes of her own life and work, as well as the ambivalence of both Brazilian and British audiences following the publication of the journal on Brazil. Both subservient and defiant, Graham ultimately became a reliable insider to some as well as a treacherous outsider to others.

This article will describe and analyze the paradoxes of the reception of her text, with special attention to the implications of gender in the way her work was received by her contemporaries. I will lay out some of the main contradictions in Graham's discourse by comparing excerpts from her journal and the historical context. Ultimately, I will relate this textual analysis with specific examples of reviews that seem to manifest problematic reactions to her writings.

From 1809 to 1824, Graham embarked upon a series of travels, namely to Chile and Brazil, where she produced two of her most well known journals. In their 2010 edition of the *Journal to Brazil*, Hayward and Caballero identify and comment on some of the key moments of the narrative that manifest paradoxical positions as well as ideas that would be potentially problematic for British and male reviewers. As certain passages of her journal reveal, she had to cunningly navigate her male-dominated environment: while overtly displaying her intellect, Graham also portrayed herself with false self-deprecation. In the introduction to the journal, we discover that she voluntarily forfeits politics, justifying her exclusion of the topic: "My opportunities of information were too few; my habits as a woman and a foreigner never led me into situations where I could acquire the necessary knowledge" (Graham 59). Yet these are precisely the topics that she quickly delves into.

Moreover, Adam Smith's impact on her political and economic ideas became not only visible throughout her journal—she was convinced that a local policy of open free trade would be beneficial to both Brazil and Great Britain—but was also a double-edged sword that estranged her from Brazilian political and social circles. Ultimately, her Scottish ancestry, which she carefully distinguished from her British nationality, became a symbol of her intellectuality as well as one of the early reasons for her problematic relationship with

Great Britain. The relationship that Graham established between erudition and nationality would partially mirror the dilemma that nineteenth-century critics faced when writing about her work: whether or not nationality came first, above other expressions of identity such as gender.

Besides her writings, Graham also produced over 200 sketches of Brazilian landscapes, architecture, and social customs, a few of which were published in the original journals and reproduced in subsequent editions. Only recently have scholars recognized the value of these sketches, although no single volume has yet published the entirety of her drawings. Since the publication of the original journals, most reviewers have completely overlooked this aspect of Graham's work, and throughout the nineteenth century, only botanists and geologists noted the relevance of some of these sketches. More recently, this work has been retrieved by researchers such as Luciana Lima Martins, who has collected and written about Graham's sketches of Rio.

Graham first arrived in Brazil at one of the most crucial moments of its history— independence. Great Britain was actively seeking stronger political and commercial involvement in South America, but the nation was unable to settle on a diplomatic strategy that maintained good relations with both Portugal and Brazil. Although Great Britain did not explicitly support independence, its government backed the cause unofficially as a chance to press for abolition and access the Brazilian market. Guided by her political savvy, Graham sensed that independence was inevitable early on in 1821, before she arrived at Pernambuco: “Besides the disposition to revolution, which we were aware had long existed in every part of Brazil, there was, also, a jealousy between the Portuguese and Brazilians” (97). Later she adds: “[I]here is necessarily a great deal of anxiety among all classes of persons. Some persons have sent some of their valuables on board the frigate, for safety; ... the cause of that independence ... is now inevitable ... the only question is whether it shall be obtained with or without bloodshed” (186).

Throughout both parts of the journal, she condemns slavery and advocates for both abolition and free trade, even more so when it was evident—to her and Great Britain—that independence would not necessarily bring down protectionism or slavery. In a way, Graham voiced what Great Britain's alleged neutrality prevented it from stating officially. She supported British lobbyists who pushed for lower Brazilian tariffs and justified the “great deal of jealousy of foreigners in the present government” (139). Loyal to Adam Smith, she advocated for the mutual benefits of free trade, stressing that Britain

would benefit from an open Brazilian market. Moreover, she agreed with Great Britain about abolition, a cause that seems to be a priority throughout her writings. Her anti-slavery discourse is what, in fact, opens her journal, in a vivid account of Recife's slave market that Hayward and Caballero also mention in their study:

[W]e were absolutely sickened by the first sight of a slave-market (...) about fifty young creatures, boys and girls, with all the appearance of disease and famine consequent upon scanty food and long confinement in unwholesome places, were sitting and lying about among the filthiest animals in the streets. The sight sent us home to the ship with the heart-ache and resolution, "not loud but deep," that nothing in our power should be considered too little, or too great, that can tend to abolish or to alleviate slavery[.] (Graham 105)

This passage is significant for two reasons. It reveals both her contempt for slavery and the fact that, despite her rejection of some aspects of British identity, she admired her country's ideals of progress under the conviction that Brazil would profit from British institutions. Similarly, and as Hayward and Caballero point out, this passage exemplifies how Graham's journal is permeated by quotes from British writers, historians, and philosophers. In fact, her reference to the Shakespearean quote "not loud but deep" allows her to advocate for abolition while giving proof of her erudition.

Although Graham's text was not embraced by scholars until nearly a century after its publication, contemporary sources agree on the quality of her work and, as Akel points out, she has come to be mainly known "as a scholar and travel writer in academic circles" (11). At the time of publication, although her work did not garner rave reviews, critics praised specific aspects of it possibly because of its undeniable superiority to that of other English travel writers in Brazil (most of these were men, although some women such as Ida Pfeiffer and Jemima Kindersley, wrote briefly about Brazil). In the first place, Graham's journal offers more detailed information. While this is unsurprising in passages that describe women and female-related spaces (like her accounts on family life), Akel points out that Graham's level of detail, even in fragments related to politics and other male-dominated environments, is higher than that of her male counterparts. Given that male travel writers were probably barred from many female spaces in nineteenth-century Brazil, absence of descriptions about family life and Brazilian homes in their work is to be

expected. According to Hayward and Caballero, of the five male travel writers who were active around 1824—John Mawe, Gilbert Mathison, Alexander Caldcleugh, John Luccock, and Henry Koster—only Luccock and Koster had some access to female spaces (21-22).

Moreover, Graham seems to be more committed to an anti-abolitionist discourse than contemporary male writers, and in that sense, her account was closer to British interests. This difference could also explain the immediate reception her work had among Brazilian political circles and British immigrants in Brazil. Graham's vehemence, which her more diplomatic male counterparts lacked, must have turned her against the Brazilian crown, which was supportive of slave trade, as well as most of the British community in Brazil, whom Graham portrayed as avaricious, ignorant slave-holders:

The English society is just such as one may expect. A few merchants, not of the first order ... Not one knew the name of the plants around his own door; not one is acquainted with the country ten miles beyond ... in short, I was completely out of patience with these incurious money-makers ... Their slaves, for the English are all served by slaves, indeed, eat a sort of porridge of mandioc (...). (Graham 148)

Be it due to ideology or simply the fact that Graham's male counterparts had deeper interests to protect, these opposing discourses highlighted the uniqueness of Graham's work.

According to Hayward and Caballero, by the time Graham arrived, Brazil was Britain's third largest market, yet written information about the country was scarcer than in other continents such as India or Africa (18). Poet and historian Robert Southey (1774-1843), author of a thorough historical account on Brazil, became Graham's main source of information. This exemplifies the difficult exchange of information between Great Britain and Brazil: Southey's work was considered the canon of Brazilian history written in English, yet there are no records that prove he was ever in South America. Similarly, most male travel writers who wrote about Brazil actually made brief stops there while heading to other destinations, in clear contrast to Graham's experience.

Such a lack of information only made Graham's work more valuable. Though there is no evidence that she intended to inform the British crown of Brazilian affairs, it is undeniable that her information as a political insider was unique and readily available. She was close not only to the Emperor and his wife, and thus a common visitor in court, but

also to Lord Thomas Cochrane, a British officer of the Royal Navy who provided military support to the leaders of Brazil's independence. Graham had the privilege to witness a military battle fought on 12 June 1823 in Bahia, which she thoroughly registered in her journal (256), and hers is the only first-hand account of the battle written by a woman. As a business insider, Graham also arrived at a pivotal moment for trade relationships between Great Britain and Brazil and she denounced practices that affected British interests that no one else wrote about. For instance, she criticized the Brazilian Ministry of Finance for what she considered a reckless fiscal policy after the government had "taken upon itself to refuse payment" of debts owed to Great Britain (139). Not only was this type of information unique, but it was also published months prior to an important trade agreement renegotiation: "[T]he 1810 Commerce and Trade Treaty signed between Portugal and Britain would expire and be renegotiable in the middle of 1825. If Portugal had no interest in extending its trade relationship with Britain, dealing directly with a British-recognized, independent Brazil would be necessary to ensure Great Britain economic privileges in Brazil" (Hayward and Caballero 38). If not used to make a stronger case for the British prior to this negotiation, Graham's journal was at the very least useful in that it helped the spread of Brazil's bad political reputation abroad.

As we have seen, Graham's alignment with British commercial ambitions coexisted with an animosity toward the English community in Brazil. Opposing stances on free trade and abolition provoked major disagreements, but when it came to her views on social customs, she initially agreed with the British elite in Brazil. In fact, the first part of her journal shows a much more prejudiced Maria Graham, one who thought that Brazilian homes were "disgustingly dirty" and that local gentlewomen were "indecently slovenly after very early youth," "ill combed," with an "unwashed appearance" and a "manner of talking" that is "as disgusting as their dress" (135-136). Graham's belief on the superiority of British manners and style may have unintendedly generated a writer-reviewer complicity in which gender was overlooked in favor of a shared sense of national values. However, her views are not consistent throughout the entire journal. In some passages of the second part, Graham dismisses the superiority of Great Britain's gaze and defends the reputation of Brazilians. Her aversion to the British seems to grow in proportion to her liking of Brazilians.

The way in which Maria Graham's journals evade a homogenous categorization was detrimental for their contemporary reception as it opened the door to criticism from all

fronts. The period of 1809-1824 is relevant not only for the timeframe of her work in Brazil and her total stay in South America (1821-1824), but also because during these years she became a published author at Great Britain's renowned Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green. Sources agree that, overall, her first publications *Journal of a Residence in India* (1812) and *Three Months Passed in the Mountains East of Rome during the year 1819* (1820), both published by Longman, were "well-received books" (Hayward and Caballero 17 and Akel 221). In fact, her journal on India was broadly reviewed, and in three years, more than ten literary magazines in Europe, most of them British but also German and French, had written about her work.² Nonetheless, some early reviews prove that it was, at best, a rather tepid reception, at times marked by dismissal more than praise. *The British Critic, and Quarterly Theological Review*, for instance, dismissed the *Journal of a Residence in India* but notoriously claimed gender did not interfere with their opinion (which, in turn, reveals an understanding that this was the case with many critics): "We have never been at all inclined to depress the hopes, or mortify the ambition of female authors, but we cannot conscientiously allow that this publication has any very strong claims to our commendation" (652). In other cases, such as the critique published in the *Quarterly Review*, repudiation and praise came both at the same time: "The Journal of a Residence in India, by a young lady who probably went thither, like most young ladies, to procure a husband instead of information, is a literary curiosity which we are not disposed to overlook" (406).

As analyzed by Ellen Jordan, women in the first decades of nineteenth-century Great Britain lived the industrial transformation that accentuated the opposition between work (the male public sphere) and the household (the female private sphere). Jordan mentions that "the prohibition against women entering the public sphere was extended" (35) to the point that women were discouraged from occupying (and mistrusted if they did) any professional positions, regardless of how ancillary or subordinate these were:

While it was becoming possible for men to earn an upper-middle-class income in the increasingly bureaucratized areas of business and government, there was no possibility of their wives participating... Even in situations, such as in professional households, where home and work had not yet been separated, there was a similar exclusion of wives and

² See Nottingham Trent University's "Maria Graham Project," an online initiative that, since 2007, has sought to re-evaluate Graham's legacy and centralize information about her work: http://www4.ntu.ac.uk/apps/research/groups/22/home.aspx/project/154085/overview/maria_graham_project. This project identified and enumerated the literary magazines that reviewed Graham's work.

daughters. Professional practice was increasingly regulated ... so that even if a professional man still worked from home, there was strong pressure against his wife or daughter acquiring his skills by acting as his assistant.
(30)

Thus, unsurprisingly, gender became the first obstacle in Graham's reception and critics viewed her debut with distrust. Her work was taken more seriously as she began publishing more and, despite the gender-based skepticism, critics overall agreed on her strong narrative skills. On the other hand, being a woman proved to be the cause of rejection as well as the key that allowed her to garner some of the best praise, since Graham—as a woman—had access to spaces that fellow male travel writers had been unable to explore, and critics of her two-part *Journey of a Voyage to Brazil* and her *Journal of a Residence in Chile* (published at the same time in 1924 in a co-edition by Longman and Murray) valued these contributions. It is also worth pointing out that most of her books sold well: her journal on India managed to get a second edition while those on Chile and Brazil had print runs of 750 copies each, an amount high enough to pay off her royalties (Hayward and Caballero 55).

The *Monthly Review, or Literary Journal Enlarged* and the *Quarterly Review* were the two journals that reviewed Graham's work the most. Her relationship with the latter was particularly complicated due to the publication's insistence on the gender issue as well as its derisive approach to her work, especially when William Jacob authored the reviews. At first, the publication avoids the overt sexism expressed in the review of her work on India by limiting its criticism to a strictly technical aspect of her book—the inaccurate dates of the introduction meant to provide readers with a context of Portuguese and Brazilian history: “Mrs. Graham, who has conveyed to the public her account of Brazil during two visits to that country, has thought proper to introduce it with a hasty and ill-arranged abridgement of Mr. Southey's valuable history of that country” (Jacob 13). The reviewer refers to Robert Southey, previously mentioned as Graham's main historical source and regular contributor of the *Quarterly Review*.

What seems initially to be an inimical review becomes more complex as derision begins to build: “As she boasts to have performed the Herculean task of having ‘read nearly all that are to be found in print of [Southey's] authorities, and some that he does not mention,’ it would have been as well to take care to be correct in her quotations” (Jacob 13). Although the critic seems bothered by Graham's thorough references to Southey's

work, rancor against her erudition per se cannot be gleaned from this quote alone. Overall, the issue of historical inaccuracies takes up most of the first part in the review, with legitimate and detailed corrections of her mistakes:

Villegagnon did not convey the young queen of Scotland to France in 1648, for both he and that unfortunate female happen to have been dead many years before. Henry II, king of France, was killed in July 1558, the year in which Villegagnon went to Brazil, and could not therefore, “on his return to Europe,” have given him the command of two ships. Henry IV, king of France, was assassinated in May, 1610, and therefore could not “send Daniel de la Touche, shortly after 1611, to examine Brazil in order to form a permanent colony.” (Jacob 13-14)

Yet the belittling tone escalates thereafter: “Thus, from page 16, it must be supposed that Mary of Guise retained her activity when 140 years old; and, from page 6, that Christian Jaques was an able commander at a more advanced age,” until gender oddly becomes, for the reviewer, the source of these mistakes:

If Mrs. Graham had copied nothing from the newspapers, and had been sensible that, with her slight knowledge of the characters with whom she mixed, her ignorance of the language in which they conversed, and her imperfect acquaintance with the customs and manners of the people, she was unqualified to write *political* disquisitions of Brazil, she might have presented to the public a small volume that would have been read with a considerable degree of interest. Her descriptions of the parties to which she was introduced are probably accurate. (Jacob 14)

Evidently, although the reviewer seemed to have initially tried to temper his gender-driven disregard, his conclusion represents the typical response to writings by women that attempted to cross from the private into the public sphere. He is evidently bothered by the fact that she has entered the field of politics and suggests she limit her scope to that of female spaces—the only ones in which her accuracy could be assured.

Jacob also uses gender to explain positive aspects of the book, such as Graham’s masterful narrative: “The description of the residences, their internal appearance, and that

of the inhabitants of Bahia, is sketched in a manner that only a lady seeing them without the parade which usually accompanies the public exhibitions of the females, could have successfully executed” (Jacob 17). In another passage, he even praises her narrative skills in a fragment that does not belong to the private sphere to which he relegates her: “One of the most interesting events, however unusual with female adventurers, was an excursion from the city of Pernambuco, then in a state of siege, to the camp of the insurgents who had invested it; and is extremely well told” (Jacob 14).

Graham reacted to many of the negative reviews she received. In her second edition of her journal on India, for instance, she commented on the *Quarterly Review*'s 1812 critique by clarifying that she “did *not* go to India in search of a husband” (qtd. in Gotch 142). Similarly, her correspondence with her own publishers is significant because it allows us to see not only more reactions but also her ability to form business networks and negotiate. She also managed to form a close friendship with Scottish editor John Murray, with whom she worked as a translator and editorial assistant in the decade of 1810. Coincidentally, he was also a co-founder of the *Quarterly Review*.

Graham's letters to Murray, available at the National Library of Scotland and partially transcribed by Hayward and Caballero, reveal her uncensored thoughts regarding the way the publishing industry was treating her work. Graham and Murray seem to be so close that she even turned to him after reading William Jacob's reviews in Murray's own literary gazette. In a letter to him of 28 April 1824 she writes:

I wrote you a note yesterday requesting you to lend me the literary gazette in which I have been attacked. I like to see what is said. I am told it is malicious—but I really cannot bring my self to care about it... I have little doubt of Messrs Longman being the instigators of the crying down of Brazil for the sake of their other friends—but I shall know better when I have seen the thing. (qtd. in Hayward and Caballero, 56)

Two elements stand out: the fact that despite Murray's involvement in the *Quarterly Review*, Graham blames Longman for the negative review; and the fact that she seems to imply—though it remains unclear—that Longman's conflict of interests kept him from officially defending her material. In other words, fighting for a book that Longman's own company was publishing may have seemed less important to him than maintaining good relations within some sectors in Great Britain, many of which were not only criticized by

Graham but also at odds with the Brazilian crown. That same year, on December 19, she writes a more outraged letter to Murray:

Tories as your writers in your Quarterly Review generally are, I did not think that you would ever have come to such a pitch of spite for I can call it nothing else as to print a long article solely for the purpose of ridiculing any people who should try to be free... It is quite evident the reviewer has not read *me*. That however no *woman* need be surprised at till we have been dead fifty or a hundred years. Men never find out that we are entitled to think or speak our minds—and then the only chance we have is, if we have been profligate mistresses to coarse princes—then indeed there is a chance of having our characters whitewashed and our talents admired *in the Quarterly Review*. (qtd. in Hayward and Caballero 56-57)

This is perhaps one of the few instances in which Graham abandons the twofold narrative of self-deprecation and boastfulness, and vehemently condemns the sexism to which she has been subjected.

Many factors may explain why, in some moments, reviews went past her gender despite the ambivalence. On the one hand, the political context may have coincidentally made her work valuable, and, on the other, the quality of the journal stands out, especially when compared with that of her fellow travel writers. Despite the evident utility of her information, reviewers were never explicit about the political value of her journals. Their subtle praise implies they momentarily jumped past the gender issue, tangentially focusing on other pieces of information from which public officials could profit.

More perplexing is the fact that it took decades before the value of her work was studied and acknowledged by scholars and critics, and more contemporary reception has not been ambiguous about her quality. It took almost a century for her work to be translated to Portuguese and revitalized by scholars in Brazil, and, in fact, the initial translations published in the first half of the twentieth century were all fragments of her journal. The first was Alfredo de Carvalho's translation of a passage on Pernambuco, published on the 11th issue of the *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico e Geográfico Pernambucano* in 1904. Two decades later, Brazilian zoologist Cândido Firmino de Mello-Leitão resumed efforts to resuscitate part of Maria Graham's work and translated various fragments in two

of his books: *Visitantes do Primeiro Império* (1934) and *O Brasil visto pelos ingleses* (1937), both published by Companhia Editora Nacional in São Paulo.

Graham managed to attract the attention of fields outside history and politics, and she was first taken seriously, at a scholarly level, in the fields of biology and geology,³ in part because of her botanical drawings. Her complete journal was published in Brazil in 1956, translated by Américo Jacobina Lacombe and edited by Companhia Editora Nacional in São Paulo. In his foreword, Lacombe indicates that “[a] personalidade da autora está a exigir de brasileiro estudo carinhoso e digno” (11) and refers to previous publications on her life and work: Gotch’s previously mentioned biography from 1937 and José Valenzuela’s Spanish translation of her journal on Chile, published in two volumes in 1902 and 1909. Although the reasons behind a gap of almost fifty years between the corresponding translations of journals on Chile and Brazil are not explained, it is highly possible that this difference responds to the political environment in each country. Graham’s journal on Brazil—always supportive of the nation’s independence—was not even taken into account for Rio’s exhibition celebrating the independence centennial in 1922.

Not only were Graham’s critics ambiguous when they wrote about her, but she was also subject to diverse and at times contradicting opinions. Her work, now given the academic status it long deserved, remained forgotten for almost a century in part due to her gender, but also as a result of her unwillingness to pay heed to the interests of powerful groups. This aspect of her writing and her personality—which buried her work for decades—is now also the cause of her uniqueness: “knowing that no human good can be attained without a mixture of evil, [the writer] trusts that a fair picture of both has been given, although it has cost some pain in the writing” (Graham 6).

³ Graham’s account on the 1822 earthquake in Chile was quoted in *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, 28, New Haven: pp. 236-247, and it was presented as evidence of coastal rise produced by earthquakes.

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