



Maria Graham: A Literary Biography

Regina Akel

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Maria Graham's story is as remarkable as her work, and this biography not only narrates her life but also delves into the representation she made of herself in her published and unpublished journals, diaries, memoirs, and letters. The result of her endeavours is a literary persona that appears far removed from the controversial woman that she actually was. Who is the woman behind the texts? How did she conceive them? Was she simply one of many other adventurous and articulate female authors of the nineteenth century, or did she for some reason stand apart? This book shows how she manufactured her identity at times by conforming to, challenging, or ignoring the rules of society regarding women's behaviour. She was a child of the Enlightenment in that she valued knowledge above all things, yet she flavoured her discoveries with a taste of romanticism. Her search took her to distant lands where she captured for her readers foreign cultural manifestations, exotic landscapes, and obscure religious rites; yet a reading of her work generates the impression that despite the dramatic descriptions of peoples and places, Graham's subject was, simply, herself. What we know of her story comes mainly from her own narratives, although there are significant letters to, from, and about her that round up the analysis. This biography reconstructs Maria Graham's literary image by means of significant passages of her work, memoirs, diaries, journals, and letters. The chosen texts are meant to illustrate salient features of her style and of her interaction with the prevalent ideologies of her time. The intention is to display a groundbreaking female intellectual who captured for her readers the ancient culture of India as deftly as she represented bloodthirsty bandits in the north of Italy or nascent countries in South America.

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