

International Library of Sociology

Founded by Karl Mannheim

Editor: John Urry

Lancaster University

Consuming the Caribbean

From Arawaks to Zombies

Mimi Sheller

Iconic islands

Nature, landscape, and the tropical tourist gaze

The familiar sun-sea-and-sand imagery used in Caribbean tourism promotion may seem like an endlessly repeated cliché that hardly requires any further analysis. Used to promote everything from package holidays and cruises to time-shares and villa purchases all over the world, a more generic, global, and empty signifier of 'the tropical island' could hardly be imagined. Alongside it a slightly different variation draws on an ecotourism imagery of 'unspoilt' primal rainforests, waterfalls, and lush greenery in those parts of the Caribbean that still have some forest cover (e.g. Dominica, Tobago, St. Lucia, or parts of the Greater Antilles and Trinidad). Rather than reading these stereotypes as meaningless clichés that circulate in a global market for tropical island tourism, I want to explore specifically how these iconic images arose, for what purposes, and with what effects. Both kinds of imagery (palm-fringed beach and verdant forest) pick up on longstanding visual and literary themes in Western culture based on the idea of tropical islands as microcosms of earthly Paradise.

This chapter is concerned with consumption of the ecological environment of the Caribbean in the widest sense and its reinvention as a 'nature' and 'landscape' for Northern Atlantic inhabitants' pleasure and use. It could be argued that there is no 'primal nature' in the Caribbean both because so much of it has been constructed by human intervention and because every aspect of it is dosed with a heavy infusion of symbolic meaning and cultural allusions. Here I will consider how Europeans moved through the Caribbean, introduced exotic species, removed seeds, fruits, and timber, and represented Caribbean plants and landscapes verbally and visually. Any effort to find an 'original' Caribbean immediately comes up against the cultural remaking of its human, floral, and faunal populations (Crosby 1972). Introduced plants include many mainstays, e.g. coffee, sugar cane, bananas, and citrus trees from the Middle East; yams and ackee trees from Africa; potatoes, maize, and chilli peppers from the Americas; mangoes, rice, and hemp (marijuana) from Asia; and the famous breadfruit trees brought back from Tahiti by Captain Bligh in 1793. Introduced animals include cattle, sheep, goats, horses, cats, dogs, rats, mongoose, farmed shrimp, and many more. People, of course, have come from almost every part of the world. Networks of transportation infrastructure, capital investment, and scientific work enabled these various movements of people, animals, and plants: the contemporary Caribbean is an assemblage.

Although 'the modern traveller still perceives the landscape as bearing the imprint of bounteous serendipity', David Watts argues, 'the senses deceive' because the Caribbean has suffered major species loss and habitat degradation, including unabated faunal destruction over the last century (Watts 1990: 3, 40). As Stuart McCook points out in a study of agriculture in the Spanish Caribbean, the expansion of export crops grown on single cash-crop plantations, such as sugar, bananas, coffee, and cacao, 'unintentionally created an environment ideal for the spread of disease and pests. Global crop epidemics became commonplace as the development of steamships and railroads accelerated the spread of pathogens and pests' (McCook 2002: 21). The mobility of planters and plant varieties, and of scientists and knowledge about tropical agriculture, were thus tightly wedded to the mobility of plant diseases and vectors of agricultural catastrophe. How is it that the massive introduction of alien species, forest clearance, stripping of plant cover, soil erosion, and reef destruction in the Caribbean remain invisible in the global tourist economy where the Caribbean is packaged and sold as 'pristine' beaches and verdant rainforest? I suggest that contemporary views of tropical island landscapes are highly over-determined by the long history of literary and visual representations of the tropical island as Paradise. As Richard Grove has argued, 'the commercial and utilitarian purposes of European expansion produced a situation in which the tropical environment was increasingly utilised as the symbolic location for the idealised landscapes and aspirations of the Western imagination' (Grove 1995: 3). The island imagination today draws on these earlier precedents, and makes certain kinds of movement through the Caribbean viable. The Caribbean island is one of the first 'global icons' (cf. Franklin *et al.* 2000) to encapsulate modernity, enfolding within itself a deep history of relations of consumption, luxury, and privilege for some. Rather than calling for a recovery of an authentic Caribbean or attempting to reconstruct the indigenous or Afro-Caribbean view of the natural world (which could again be recuperated into the colonial picturesque), I will instead track how the idea of 'the Caribbean' was constructed in the European imaginary, and how this work of imagination then came to inform travel there.

There are striking continuities in representations of the Caribbean, as well as some major shifts in the European relation to tropical nature and landscapes. My focus here is the points of contact between mobile material and cultural networks, which set off flows of people and things across the Atlantic world, yet also conjoin to lock certain things in place: colonies, slaves, landed property, service workers, tourist resorts. Varied genres of representation of nature, I argue, are inseparable from changing modes of economic enterprise and consumer envelopment in the tropics. Thus Euro-American relations to Caribbean 'natural' landscapes are a crucial starting-point for understanding the social relations of power that inform their relationship to Caribbean people. I have identified three major ways of seeing or portraying the Caribbean within Northern Atlantic representational practices,¹ each of which can be roughly aligned with one of the key periods of European and later US economic relations to the region. The first arose in what I

termed the period of 'discovery', piracy, and 'bachelor plantations', and concerns the 'productions of nature' as living substances with particular kinds of utilitarian value. From the original European 'discovery' of a botanical cornucopia in the tropics (heavily indebted to indigenous knowledge) to its collection, ordering, and study, botanical collection and pharmaceutical testing of tropical flora have reshaped Europe's relation to 'nature', scientific knowledge, and conservation. The work of Sir Hans Sloane, discussed in Chapter 1, is characteristic of this approach to New World nature in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries.

Second, I turn to the eighteenth-century 'scenic economy' in which tropical landscapes came to be viewed through a painterly aesthetic constructed around comparative evaluations of cultivated land versus wild vistas. Associated with the period of ascendance of the colonial sugar plantation system, this form of visual consumption often utilised a 'rhetoric of presence' (Pratt 1992) which offered an implicit ideological legitimisation of slavery. The visual practices that organised such views, it must be said, were not specific to the Caribbean, but can be found operating in other parts of the colonial world as well. While each visual regime may be associated with a particular era of Caribbean history, I would not insist that it occurred as such only then and there. Through the circulation of books, prints, and libraries earlier modes of seeing always resurface and leave cues in later texts. Thus my method is to collect representative examples for purposes of illustration and argument, rather than to be comprehensive.

And third, in the nineteenth century there was a renewed emphasis on 'wild' nature and the bodily experience of immersion in it. This Romantic vision of untamed tropical nature, which arose especially in the period following the abolition of slavery, was constructed around experiences of moving through Caribbean landscapes and of experiencing bodily what was already known imaginatively through literature and art. In this revival of earlier discourses of the natural productivity of the tropical island paradise, a new United States imperialism was justified as the best use of 'virgin' natural resources, which local people were thought to be incapable of capitalising on. Contemporary tourism emerged out of this romantic imperialism, though keeping remnants of the earlier representational practices as well. Each of these imaginaries and its associated images, I argue, leaves traces that continue to inform the iconicity of the Caribbean today. The Caribbean is consumed both in travelling representations (texts, images, signs) that bring the Caribbean to the consumer, and by travelling consumers who organise their experience and perceptions of the Caribbean through existing visual regimes.

Productions of nature: trade in botanical knowledge

European consumption of the Caribbean began with 'discovery', exploration, and biological devastation of the land, plants, animals, and native populations of the Caribbean from 1492 onwards. This included the incorporation of new lands into growing empires often through enslavement of the inhabitants found there;

provisioning of ships and new settlements with food, shelter, and drink; and the release of omnivorous alien species, from swine and feral cattle to bacterial and viral pathogens. 'The history of European horticulture in the Americas,' notes Alfred Crosby Jr, 'begins with the second voyage of Columbus [in 1493], when he returned to [Hispaniola] with seventeen ships, 1,200 men, and seeds and cuttings for planting of wheat, chickpeas, melons, onions, radishes, salad greens, grape vines, sugar cane, and fruit stones for the founding of orchards' (Crosby 1972: 67). Unfortunately for these colonists, neither wheat to make bread, nor grape vines to make wine, nor olive trees to make oil (the three staples of the Mediterranean diet), would flourish in the hot, wet lowlands of the West Indies. They had more success, however, in the release of domesticated animals, which by 1518 were proliferating across the Greater Antilles. Livestock were also dropped on smaller outlying islands as an emergency supply. Without predators or keepers, the numbers of these feral animals 'burgeoned so rapidly, in fact, that doubtlessly they had much to do with the extinction of certain plants, animals, and even Indians themselves, whose gardens they encroached upon' (ibid.: 75). The introduction of European diseases contributed even more to the decimation of the indigenous population, which I return to in Chapter 5.

The major hurdle facing all European projects of exploration and colonisation in the sixteenth century was the problem of survival once having arrived on the distant shores of the New World. Crucial to survival on these initial voyages was the opportunity to learn from the indigenous inhabitants found in these new lands about how to cultivate edible plants, how to hunt, and how to prepare food and shelter from what nature had to offer. As David Watts suggests, Europeans only survived in the West Indies in so far as they adapted Indian techniques and lifestyles, such as ring-barking as a method of land clearance, *conuco* agriculture based on manioc and sweet potatoes, Indian-style huts and hammocks, and canoes for transportation (Watts 1990: 174). While European mytho-history emphasises the goodwill and generosity of the 'Indians', enslavement was the most likely means of knowledge transfer for those who survived the epidemics of smallpox. European explorers in the Caribbean were therefore extremely interested in recording the forms and uses of the plants they found in use by the Arawaks or Taino, before they all died off. These could then be made available in Europe to other potential explorers and colonists, giving them handbooks for survival in these unknown wilds. Catalogues of plants were carefully drawn, along with instructions on their cultivation and uses, such as those found in the late sixteenth-century 'Drake Manuscript' or *Histoire Naturelle des Indes: Les Arbres, Plantes, Fruits, Animaux, Coquillages, Reptiles, Insectes, Oiseaux, etc, qui se trouvent dans les Indes*.²

Francis Drake first sailed to the New World with John Hawkins on slaving voyages in 1567–8, and returned on several other journeys. Both men were instrumental in advancing English interests in the Caribbean, at the expense of Spain. It was Hawkins who first brought sugar from Saint Domingue back to England, while Drake went on to circumnavigate the world in 1577–80, thus becoming a popular hero in England.³ Drake's voyage 'became especially

important in stimulating the entry of images of tropical nature into popular culture in England, particularly in the cheaper street literature' such as P. Brooksby's *The Voyages and Travels of that Renowned Captain Sir Francis Drake* (1683) (Grove 1995: 39). The 'Drake Manuscript' was written in French by an anonymous member of Drake's party, who painted close to two hundred watercolour images of West Indian plants and animals, and scenes of the lives of Indian, European, and African inhabitants of the Spanish territories in the New World. Here a catalogue of 'useful' plants are depicted in isolation from their natural setting, against a blank background, and accompanied by notes on their indigenous use and cultivation. A palm tree, for example, is depicted along with an accompanying text, which describes how the indigenous people made a palm wine, tasting like sherry (Plate 2.1). The separation of the tree from its surroundings serves to emphasise its form, leaf structure and unusual bark, perhaps to aid in identification. In addition to the form of the plant, it also crucially depicts how the plant was cultivated by clearing surrounding trees, and building a fire around the base to keep out 'poisonous beasts' while the palm juice is tapped into a bowl made from a gourd.

The palm would go on to become a key symbolic icon representing the entire Caribbean region. Its immediate significance can be seen in this well-known and much-reproduced seventeenth-century account of the Buccaneers, referring here to the island of Hispaniola:

There are an abundance of Palm Trees found here, some of which are two hundred foot high, having no branches but what are upon the very top; every month one of these branches falleth off, and at the same time another sprouteth out; the leaves of this tree are seven or eight foot in length, and three or four in breadth, with which they cover their houses instead of Tyles: Also they make buckets of them to carry their Water in. The body of the Tree is so big, that two men can scarcely grasp it in the middle; yet the heart of it is so soft, that if two or three inches be pared off its outside, the rest may be sliced like new Cheese. The Inhabitants have a way of extracting an excellent Drink from this Tree; for gouging it a little above the Root, they [fr]om thence distill a sort of Liqueur which in short time by fermentation becometh as strong as the richest Wine.⁴

Not only is the size of the tree staggering in terms of height, breadth, and gigantic foliage, but it also serves diverse needs as vessel, shelter, and wine. Here again we see the novelty of the tree to Europeans, who were especially attracted by the production of palm wine, since alcoholic beverages were in short supply on long sea voyages.⁵ The images in the Drake Manuscript and early travel accounts fit more into the category of instruction manual or colonist's guide. Their concerns are with the ways in which people (both native and European) can make use of the plants depicted, rather than with how nature looks (as in later romantic scenic genres) or how plants can be ordered (as in later more purely botanical records).

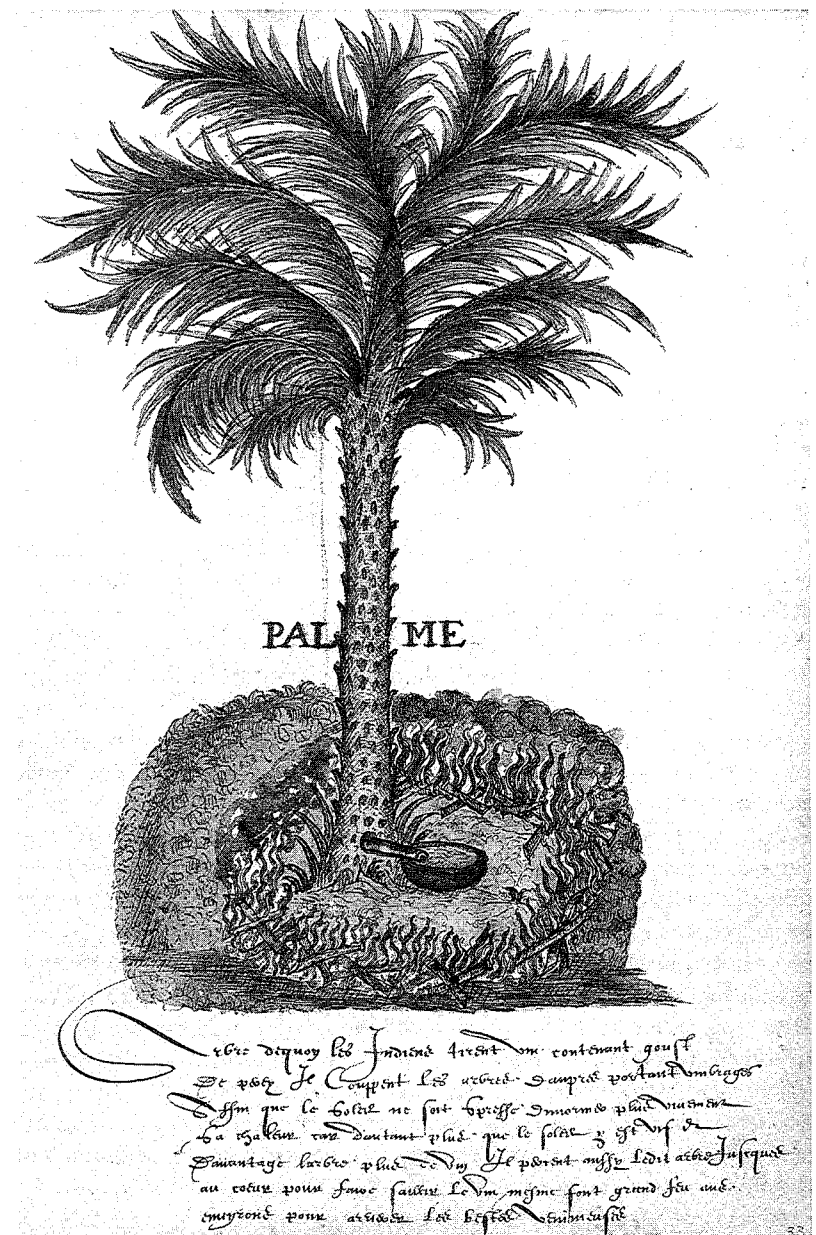


Plate 2.1 Representing the uses of 'nature' in the contact zone.
'Palme' from The Drake Manuscript *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*. Credit: The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MA 3900, f.33. Photography: David A. Loggie.

Such early European views of Caribbean islands presented a fascination with a particular type of tropical landscape and particular kinds of 'natural' and 'cultivated' scenery, especially the edible kind. The Drake Manuscript's series of forty-three images of human activity depict indigenous practices such as fishing, trapping parrots and rabbits, cooking, washing and swimming, making flour, gardening, harvesting, treating wounds, hunting wild boar, spinning cotton, and net-making. The author concludes that 'They are so skilled that one could not show them any work which they could not do'. This remarkable document attests to the sophistication of the culture the Europeans found in the New World, and the extent to which they learned to survive by adapting indigenous technologies and knowledges. Even today we live in the linguistic and material penumbra of this 'contact zone' (Pratt 1992), whether firing up the 'barbecue', lounging in a 'hammock', paddling a 'canoe', lighting up a smoke of 'tobacco', or sipping 'cocoa'.⁶

But early accounts of the Caribbean are not simply utilitarian; they are also informed by an imagery of tropical fecundity and excessive fruitfulness, which conjured up utopian fantasies of sustenance without labour, even though this was manifestly at odds with the difficult experience of survival. As Grove and others have convincingly shown, such accounts draw on a range of precedents such as the biblical Garden of Eden, the classical garden of the Hesperides, and the Renaissance botanical garden, which was itself derived from Middle Eastern models. Columbus may even have believed that the Garden of Eden actually existed in the extreme Orient, but like the ancient Greek Elysium was reached by sailing West; that would explain why he took Luis de Torres, a scholar of Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldaic with him (Prest 1981: 31). Herman Pleij has also pointed to the influence of the medieval fantasy of the perfect life existing in the 'Land of Cockaigne', where food was endlessly abundant and no labour was needed in its preparation. In one of Columbus's letters he describes the New World as 'a veritable Cockaigne' because of the abundance of food (Pleij 2001). The dream of Cockaigne was associated with other visions of life's pleasures, including abundant alcohol, easily available sex, and even immortality. All of these fantastical precedents fed into the early accounts of the New World, yet lived in tension with the clearly present danger of starvation without indigenous help or enslavement.

Such idyllic images of the West Indies also served in the propaganda campaign by which colonial adventurers sought financial backing and royal patronage for their schemes, as well as potential settlers and indentured servants to join their enterprise. Thus in one early seventeenth-century report on the wondrous edible plants of Barbados we meet with familiar tropes of a prelapsarian nature:

A tree like a Pine, beareth a fruit so great as a Muske Melon, which hath alwayes ripe fruit, flowers or greene fruit, which will refresh two or three men, and very comfortable; Plum trees many, the fruit great and yellow, which but strained into water in foure and twenty houres will be very goode drinke; wilde figge trees there are many . . . all things we there plant doe grow exceedingly, so well as Tobacco; the corne, pease, and beanes, cut but away

the stalkes, young sprigs will grow, and so bear fruit for many yeeres together, without any more planting.⁷

Much like the Drake Manuscript, this text mixes together descriptions of plants with instructions on how to cultivate and prepare them. Coming from a land of four seasons, Europeans had never seen plants that flowered and fruited throughout the year, carrying green fruit, ripe fruit, and flowers all at the same time. As Grove notes of such writing, in discovering the tropical island 'Paradise had become a realisable geographical reality' (Grove 1995: 51); it was the Garden of Eden before the fall of Man.

It has been further suggested by early modern historians that the discovery of the 'New World' contributed to an epistemic shift in European visual representations of the natural world. During the Renaissance natural images had served an 'emblematic' function in which images of plants or animals condensed a complex web of allegorical, mythical, and epigrammatic meanings (Ashworth 1990). From about 1650 onwards, claims Ashworth (following Michel Foucault's argument in *The Order of Things* that the publication of Joannes Jonston's *Natural History* was a crucial turning-point), a modern discourse developed in which plants and animals were represented simply as what they were, rather than what they stood for. One explanation for this representational shift is that with the discovery of a new terrain and new natures, novel plants and animals entered European consciousness bereft of any accrued meanings. In the texts of the New World natural histories by writers like Charles L'Ecluse, Jan de Laet, Juan Nieremberg, and Georg Markgraf, nature was bare and for the first time unadorned with superfluous meaning:

Their impact derived from one simple fact. The animals of the new world had no known similitudes. Anteaters and sloths do not appear in Erasmus or Alciati or Piero Valeniano; they are missing from the writings of antiquity. They came to the Old World naked, without emblematic significance . . . [Naturalists] were forced to limit their descriptions to discussions of appearance, habitat, food and whatever tales could be assembled from native populations.

(Ashworth 1990: 318)

For the first time knowledge of the natural world could be – had to be – codified into 'natural facts' absent of myth, fable, or allegorical resonance. While Ashworth himself adds other explanations to this account, we can nevertheless agree that the discovery of the West Indies was crucial to a shift in European attitudes towards the natural world and its 'products'. The early modern period thus has its origins in this transatlantic context.

Europeans found tropical products from the Caribbean increasingly useful for a wide range of areas such as food, medicine, carpentry, and manufacturing processes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this sense the tropics were consumed not only by those who voyaged there to see the landscape and taste its

fruits, but also by the general populations who consumed the products that flowed back across the Atlantic. Tropical hardwoods and dyewoods were especially valued, including the West Indian Cedar (*Cedrela mexicana*) used for building and furniture making; the locust (*Hymenaea courbaril*) for large beams; the extremely hard ironwood (*Bunchosia nitida*) for fencing and mill rollers; and the dyewoods fustic (*Chlorophora tinctoria*) and *lignum vitae* (*Guaiaecum officinale*) (Watts 1990: 155). The latter was not only initially believed to cure syphilis (especially used in conjunction with treatment by mercury), but also contained essential oils which preserved the wood from drying out and made it ideal for the making of marine navigational instruments. Clocks made from *lignum vitae* by John Harrison in the eighteenth century allowed the first measurement of longitude, which had revolutionary effects on European seafaring.

The French writer Père Charlevoix reported on the crucial medicinal and other uses of some of the plants exported from Jamaica in the mid-eighteenth century:

The natural produce of Jamaica, besides sugar, cacao, and ginger, are principally pimento, or, as it is called, allspice, or Jamaica pepper . . . it is milder than other spices, and is judged to be inferior to none of them for the service which it does to cold, watery and languid stomachs . . . Besides this they have the wild cinnamon tree, whose bark is so serviceable in medicine; the manchineel, a most beautiful tree to the eye, with the fairest apple in the world, and when cut down affording a very fine ornamental wood for the joiners. . . . Here is the mahogany, in such general use with our cabinet makers; the cabbage tree, a tall plant famous for a substance, looking and tasting like cabbage, growing on the very top, and no less remarkable for the extreme hardness of its wood, which when dry is incorruptible, and hardly yields to any tool; the palma, from which is drawn a great deal of oil, much esteemed by the negroes both in food and medicine; the white wood, which never breeds the worm in ships; the soap tree, whose berries answer all purposes of washing; the mangrove and olive bark, useful to tanners; the fustic and redwood to the dyers, and lately the logwood; and their forests supply the apothecary with guaiacum, sarsaparilla, china, caffia, and tamarinds; they have aloes too; . . . The indigo plant was formerly much cultivated; the cotton tree is still so, and they send home more of its wool than all the rest of our islands together.⁸

Charlevoix's report suggests a combined interest in spices, medicines, foods, ornamental woods, and various useful plant products, reflecting the diverse ends of European exploitation of tropical nature. The tropical forests provided a wide range of materials that were incorporated into European material culture both in the Tropics and at home, enabling innumerable new commercial and domestic products from a very early date. Lists such as these were themselves part of a new genre of imperialism. Laura Brown identifies such extensive lists of 'natural products' in early eighteenth-century travel narratives with a 'rhetoric of acquisition', in which 'the mere act of proliferative listing . . . and the sense of an incalculable

quantity express the period's fascination with imperialist acquisition' (Brown 1993: 43; Wheeler 1999: 18).

If the period of plantation development transformed the 'native' environments and sustainable agricultural practices that Columbus and other chroniclers had seen in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, European environments and attitudes toward nature were also transformed in the process of consuming other places. Most importantly, as Grove has meticulously argued, the European experience in the tropics led to the 'attachment of a new kind of social significance to nature':

The available evidence shows that the seeds of modern conservationism developed as an integral part of the European encounter with the tropics and with local classifications and interpretations of the natural world and its symbolism. As colonial expansion proceeded, the environmental experiences of Europeans and indigenous peoples living at the colonial periphery played a steadily more dominant and dynamic part in the construction of new European evaluations of nature and in the growing awareness of the destructive impact of European economic activity on the peoples and environments of the newly 'discovered' and colonised lands.

(Grove 1995: 24, 2–3)

As early as the seventeenth century the first inklings of the fragility of ecological environments and the recognition of human impacts on nature were already apparent, and the island-worlds of the Caribbean came to represent the limits of global nature. The Caribbean was crucial in this regard inasmuch as 'the full impact of the new urban market' demanding sugar, coffee, and tobacco, was 'imposed on the fragile environments of the smaller tropical islands' (ibid.: 63). By the 1660s Barbados was already suffering from deforestation, soil erosion, landslides, and loss of fertility. Wood had to be imported from Tobago and as early as the 1760s the British implemented efforts at forest conservation on the recently ceded island of St. Kitts.⁹ As John Urry (1995) argues, economic exploitation, scientific investigation, visual consumption, and conservation all constitute different forms of appropriating the physical world, thus each can be construed as a way of 'consuming places'.

The awareness of European ecological impact on the Tropics, combined with a growing appreciation of 'the value of indigenous and local medico-botanical knowledge' (Grove 1995: 94), not only produced a conservationist attitude among some colonial authorities, but it also led to new attitudes towards nature in Europe. As Chandra Mukerji has shown, there was in seventeenth-century France, 'tremendous growth in the variety of vegetation (made possible in part through the design of special buildings and techniques devoted to the propagation and cultivation of rare plants and animals). . . . [C]ollecting a wide range of exotic plants in gardens of the seventeenth century was part of a larger cultural and economic shift' (Mukerji 1994: 441). Exotic plants moved from specialist botanical and medical gardens into the kitchen and pleasure gardens of great houses. Nobility sent gardeners on trading voyages to 'survey the decorative or

edible plants from other cultures and collect the best of them'; and in 1672, 'Colbert wrote to the director of the West India Company asking for his people to bring back unusual fruits and flowers for the royal gardens.' Thus, she argues, 'The resulting gardens can be seen as living maps, marking the capacity of the French state to control territory and manipulate the natural resources within it; in this way they mapped the political agenda of the state. They also traced the international reach of the trading system that revolved around the state' (ibid.: 442–3). Not only were new plants introduced into Europe, then, but entirely new conceptions of landscape and territory were also developed out of the taxonomic and spatial ordering of these new materials. The formal collection of exotic plants, and their careful organisation into parterres and bordered beds informed the way in which travellers approached the tropical landscape, as a terrain from which material could be collected and knowledge gathered and systematised.

In Britain, which moved to the forefront of European 'consumer culture' in the eighteenth century, but was slower to appreciate its impact on colonial environments, landscapes and the organisation of gardens took a different form. In contrast to the boundaries and territorial impositions of the French formal garden, Mukerji suggests that English gardens (such as those designed by Capability Brown) were arranged to open up views to wider landscapes and painterly scenes, which created a sense of limitless landholding and blurred the boundaries between the cultivated and the natural (cf. Bermingham 1986).¹⁰ In the following section we see how this view of landscape informed a new relation to Caribbean landscapes in the eighteenth century. Following the Gulf Stream north, we can also see how the 'fruits of empire' planted their seed in new environments, urban architectures, and rural landscapes in Britain. Glasshouses and tropical vegetation swept through landscape design, while major ports involved in the West Indies trade consumed its profits and goods in the Georgian building boom. Planters came back to assert their wealth in ostentatious displays of new country estates that rivalled those of the old landed aristocracy. If the appreciation of Caribbean landscapes began from a pursuit of survival, medicine, and natural science, the flow of tropical flora, fauna, and forms of cultivation across the Atlantic soon fed into a new 'scenic economy'. I refer to these ways of representing and viewing 'scenery' as an economy because they involved modes of accumulation, exchange, and consumption through which landscape was fetishised and turned into a commodity.

Scenic economies: the plantation as cultivated garden city

The tropical island has played a crucial part in the history of European literature, philosophy, and arts. Richard Grove traces the interest in tropical islands as Edens or Utopias back to Bishop Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638), which was set on the Atlantic island of St. Helena. William Dampier's *A New Voyage Round the World* was also influential, as were the true stories of the survival of Alexander Selkirk, who was shipwrecked on Juan Fernandez Island for over four

years. The physical setting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is thought to have been modelled on the Caribbean island of Tobago as described in John Poyntz's *The Present Prospect of the Famous and Fertile Islands of Tobago* (1683), and it led to a cult of 'robinsonnades' throughout Europe (Grove 1995: 225–9). Also crucial, of course, was William Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*, with its vaguely Caribbean setting, which fed into what Roland Greene describes as an 'island logic' in European thought (Greene 2000: 140; cf. Hulme and Sherman 2000). All of these works knitted together to make the tropical island into a kind of 'global' icon (Franklin *et al.* 2000), inasmuch as the island logic condensed all of the material and fantastical processes of production and consumption of new worlds into a single bounded space, a microcosm of God's work. In attempting to experience, see, touch, smell, taste and represent these iconic island-worlds, new forms of sensing nature and a new relation to landscape developed in Europe.

If many early texts concerning tropical islands were instrumental and practical catalogues of useful plants, animals, and 'natural products', a second major trope in European writing on the region was the envisioning of landscape as scenery. The viewer's relation to this scenery, however, changed over time, with an early emotive tie to cultivated scenes later replaced by an affective response to 'wild' and sublime landscapes, which 'moved' the viewer through the very experience of moving through the land. Here I want to trace how the eighteenth century's rationalist representations of Caribbean nature as triumphs of cultivation shifted to an increasingly emotive and romantic stylisation of nature in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Such shifts in perception and representation of landscapes have been explored more widely in relation to travellers in Central and South America (Manthorne 1989; Greenblatt 1991; Poole 1998). Deborah Poole, for example, suggests a relation between different representational technologies (oil painting, lithography, daguerrotype, *carte de visite*, stereoscope, studio photography, the Kodak camera) and multiple 'visual regimes coexisting in time and space' which together produced 'the imperial gaze' and its 'imperial subjects' (Poole 1998: 132). Following from this, I will not try to impose a rigid periodisation of the shift from one visual regime to another, but will simply indicate the different possibilities that were predominantly drawn on in particular periods and contexts. Each visual regime, however, continues to echo through the centuries, and more than one can often be found operating in any single text.

Sir Richard Dutton said of Barbados in 1681, that the dense population and intensive cultivation made it 'one great City adorned with gardens and a most delightful place' (Dunn 1972: 28). In contrast, in Edward Ward's *A Trip to Jamaica* (1698), he was most struck by the lack of cultivation in the island, which was by no means an earthly paradise, but 'the Dunghill of the Universe, the Refuse of the whole Creation, the Clippings of the Elements, a shapeless pile of Rubbish confus'dly jumbld into an Emblem of the *Chaos*, neglected by Omnipotence when form'd the World into its admirable Order' (Walcott 2000: 57). Clearly in this period 'wild nature' had no appeal to European eyes, which desired to see nature shaped, ordered, and presented. This required the exercise of certain kinds of

power, which European colonisers thought the indigenous peoples were incapable of.

Throughout most of the eighteenth century the predominant theme in descriptions of the Caribbean remains the beauty of cultivated areas set within the tropical landscape. Uncultivated land could be declared '*terra nullius*' and legitimately seized. The French writer Père Charlevoix, for example, indicates this appreciation of cultivated landscape as a sign of civilised control in Barbados in the mid-eighteenth century:

The country of Barbados has a most beautiful appearance, swelling here and there into gentle hills; shining by the cultivation of every part, by the verdure of the sugar canes, the bloom and fragrance of the number of orange, lemon, lime and citron trees, the guavas, papas, aloes, and a vast multitude of other elegant and useful plants, that rise intermixed with the houses of the gentlemen which are sown thickly on every part of the island. Even the negro huts, tho' mean, contribute to the beauty of the country; for they shade them with plantain trees, which give their villages the appearance of so many beautiful groves.¹¹

Here we see the 'useful plants' still recognised, but notable for their elegance and appearance in making up a complete scene, rather than simply being noted for their use or taste. Also notable is Charlevoix's failure to see the ecological degradation that had already taken place on Barbados by this time, denuding it of forest cover. The mixture of architectural views, a god-like perspective over every part of the island at once, and idyllic groves with quaint workers was familiar in the European tradition of landscape painting and classical allegory.

Eighteenth-century depictions of the Caribbean often give a celebratory overview of a plantation, showing not only its main crops, but also the 'negro huts' and provision grounds to one side, and the mountains or hills rising in the background. Many contain labelled areas with a list of the various features, buildings, and planted areas, and highly romantic imagery of happy peasant-like workers (Plate 2.2). While a single useful plant might appear in the foreground, a theatrical sense of the overall scene predominates. So common were these images that most visitors to the West Indies came with preconceived images of the landscape, based on books they had read and paintings or engravings they had seen. Many seemed to carry an image of the Caribbean from their reading in their youth.

Daniel McKinnen, for example, cites the writings of Richard Ligon and Père Labat on Barbados, before describing his own impressions in 1804:

At a distance the land appeared extremely bare; but as we approached it more nearly the rich and curious tropical productions captivated our eyes. On the hills the stately cabbage-trees, and on the beach the cocoanuts spreading their feathered branches, afforded a picture of which I had not formed too lively a conception from the representation of others, and to which the painter only can do adequate justice. . . . [In the Negro villages the] paths

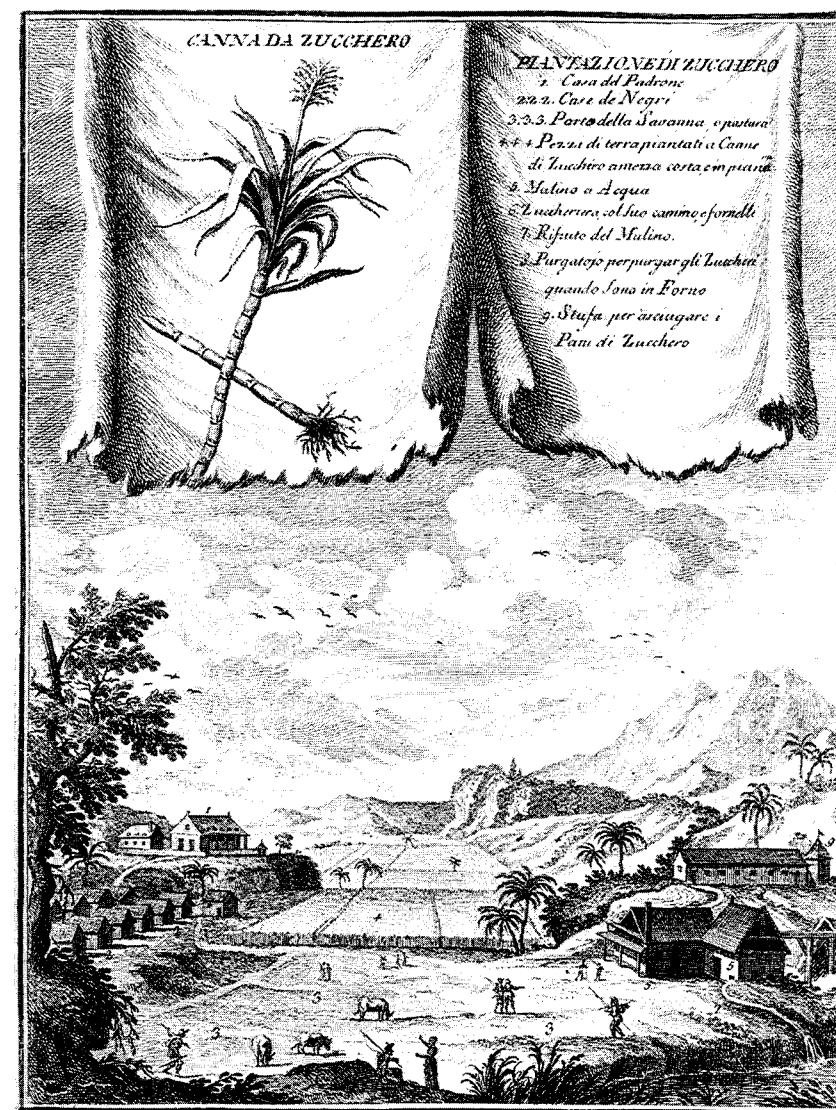


Plate 2.2 Staging the sugary scene of mastery. Canna de Zucchero, *Il Gazzetteire Americano*, Vol. 2 (Loverno, 1763). Reproduced courtesy of the British Library.

and by-lanes in which their huts are intermingled with plantains, oranges, and jessamines, and the occasional papaw, cocoa-nut, and tamarind-trees that overshadowed this odoriferous and rural scene, formed a picture enchanting by its novelty, which seemed to realize the youthful visions of imagination.¹²

It is through the eyes of painters and 'youthful visions' from illustrated books that McKinnen gazes upon the Bajan landscape. 'Guided by the representations of others', his writing style also cribs from those same books, with their lists of fruit trees and narrator moving through the landscape. He sees before him a picture, which is not so much an experience of novelty as a realisation of childhood enchantment, the very emotional investments that had already brought him to travel to this far-away place. As Gregory argues, such 'travel-scripting' is guided by previous texts, which 'produces a serialized space of constructed visibility that allows and sometimes even requires specific objects to be seen in specific ways by a specific audience. . . . [T]hey all carry within them traces of the physical movement of embodied subjects through material landscapes' (Gregory 1999: 116–17). As a viewer like McKinnen traverses the Caribbean landscape he constructs its visibility along specific lines, composing plants, people, and buildings into a preconceived ordered scene.

Viewing the Barbados scenery with an eye trained in viewing landscape paintings, McKinnen seeks appropriate vantage points from which he can describe the landscape as if it were already a picture:

Along the shore to the north of Bridge Town I found the road extremely picturesque. It leads through a long avenue of shady cocoa-nut trees, over-arched by their palmated and spacious leaves, and fenced on each side by prickly pears, or the blades of aloes. In occasional openings, or through the stems of the trees, you behold the masters' dwelling-houses with the negro-huts adjoining; and over a rich vale, abounding with cotton shrubs and maize, the hills at a small distance spotted with wind-mills, sugar-works, and a few lofty cabbage-trees, or cocoa-nuts. At times the road approaches the sea and leads along the beach. . . . It then winds into the plantations, where the cultivated parterres of cotton and tropical plants are often relieved by groups of cocoa-nuts and plantains, the leaves of which, in the form of squares or quadrangular figures, have a singular effect in the landscape.¹³

Rather than the author appearing as a moving agent in this excerpt, it is the road that is given agency: it 'leads' through, 'approaches', 'winds into'. He moves as if in a dream, the scene changing before him as if it were a panorama or diorama. Furthermore, rather than an 'I' beholding the scene, the text interpellates the reader, 'you behold', linked significantly to the moment of mentioning mastery and dwelling. As Mary Louise Pratt suggests in her study of imperial travel writing, relations of such writers to the landscape are expressed through the relation of a viewer to a painting. Gazing through his 'imperial eyes', such landscapes are aesthetically imbued, attributed with a density of meaning, and fixed by the mastery of the seer over the seen. Such a 'monarch-of-all-I-survey scene', Pratt argues, 'involve[s] particularly explicit interaction between esthetics and ideology, in what one might call a rhetoric of presence' (Pratt 1992: 204–5). Through the rhetoric of presence the scene is not only recorded, but also ordered and made present to the reader who also masters it.

Again, though, the trees and vistas in this image serve to frame the man-made elements of cultivated ground, windmills, sugar-works, and 'negro huts'. In describing Antigua McKinnen not only highlights his preference for cultivated scenery, which informed many European views of the Caribbean in this period, but also comments *negatively* upon the scenes of untouched woods and mountains, 'unrelieved' by human intervention, in other less developed colonies. Again it is the 'garden-like' imagery, and the romantic domesticity of the 'negro huts', which draw 'the eye':

the eye traverses a view of one of the fairest and best cultivated tracts of country in the windward islands. It is highly pleasing to a person who has recently come from the woods and mountains of the more southern colonies, to behold so extensive a scene of cleared land. . . . Nothing appears more completely like a garden than the sugar plantation under good cultivation. . . . The green fields of cane . . . were intermixed with provision grounds of yams and eddoes, or the dark and regular parterres of holed land prepared for the reception of the succeeding year's plant-canes. A large windmill on each estate; the planter's dwelling-house and sugar-works, with the negro huts, in their beautiful groves of oranges, plantains, and cocoanut trees, completed a landscape that continually recurred in passing over the island.¹⁴

McKinnen returns again and again to this point of view as he moves through various places. In contrast to this scene of cultivation in Antigua was the more intimidating scenery of Jamaica, where cultivated country could be left behind. Here he finds scenes of cane cultivation 'vivid' and 'romantic', while finding woods and mountains 'desert', 'wild' and 'bleak'.

The prospect before me affording nothing for the most part but a scene of wild woods and bleak uninhabited mountains, I turned towards the south, and beheld Kingston in a most majestic and expanded view below me. A beautiful enclosed plain, enlivened by cultivation, occupied the intermediate and spacious landscape; beyond it appeared the ocean, glistening to an immeasurable extent, while the brown inaccessible mountains darkened the fore ground of the picture.¹⁵

Yet what is it that enlivens the scene of cultivation? Implicit in this description is the idea that cultivation of the 'West Indies' is owed to the European introduction of slavery. Ignoring the ugliness of the slave labour that went into making these 'beautiful' scenes of well-cultivated land becomes a justification for slavery. The perception of slaves' villages as in some sense scenic adds to the implicit anti-abolitionist message, while any idea of the abolition of slavery would threaten to return such lovely scenes of cultivation to 'waste' or what in Jamaica was called 'ruinate'. Many travellers echoed this emotive and implicitly ideological vision of landscape shaped by cultivation, formed into groves and domestic enclaves

set amongst natural splendour. Captain J.E. Alexander described the landscape of coffee plantations around Georgetown in Granada, on the eve of emancipation in 1833, as if it were the kind of map found in eighteenth-century engravings of well-ordered slave plantations:

From the parterre before this charming dwelling a beautiful map was spread out before us. A succession of hill and dale descended to the sea-shore; there were cultivated fields bright with the sugar-cane; verdant slopes studded with orange trees, with fruit yellow and golden, like that of the Hesperides, whilst bananas, shaddockes, guava, and mangoe trees were equally abundant. White houses were to be seen here and there among the woodland scenery, and in the far distance were the sails of the coasting vessels.¹⁶

Here again a kind of rhetoric of presence informs a mastery of the landscape, with the coasting vessels hinting at the circuits of trade which maintain the productive capacity of the land of slavery. Contrast this reference to the Hesperides to Thomas Carlyle's vitriolic attack on Haiti: 'Let him [the black West Indian] by his ugliness, idleness, rebellion, banish all white men from the West Indies and make it all one Haiti, – with little or no sugar growing, black Peter exterminating black Paul, and where a garden of the Hesperides might be, nothing but a tropical dog-kennel and pestiferous jungle' (Carlyle 1850, cited in C. Hall 1992: 272). Here the rhetoric of presence is made explicitly into a rhetoric of white presence in the Caribbean, bolstered by the vehemently anti-Haitian Africanist rhetoric of the European imperial project in the Caribbean (Sheller 2000). Ending slavery would lead, these writers imply, to a ruined wilderness.

In sum, I have argued in this section that an earlier instrumental interest in the natural products of the Caribbean and their uses (which drew heavily on indigenous knowledge and practices) shifted, in the eighteenth century, to a scenic appreciation of landscapes as allegorical representations of cultivation and human progress. In both cases ways of seeing the island landscape involved movement through it and the recording of images which served as iconic representations of Europe's relation to the Caribbean and of an entirely new sense of global nature. In the age of 'discovery', interest in the New World was largely acquisitive and depictions conveyed the utility of specific plants and information on how to cultivate and use them. Images of nature began to function in a new way, bereft of symbolic encrustation and inserted into an economy of acquisition. By the eighteenth century there was a greater sense of the social uses of landscape, the power and mastery encoded in certain kinds of land use, and an emotional investment in the constructive project of harnessing land to generate capital. Viewers became more educated in a painterly aesthetic, which drew on existing notions of the picturesque. The perspectives of both McKinnen and Alexander suggest they were composing the scenery of the Caribbean from the kinds of subject positions which Gregory refers to as 'viewing platforms' and 'vantage points' (Gregory 1999), as safe locations from which pre-scripted 'sights' can be taken in. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 4, such views drew on the

traditions of Orientalist imagery of exotic lands of great wealth and cultivation, highlighting human control and the 'civilising' hand.

With the rise of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century, however, European feeling for certain kinds of landscape would begin to turn towards a taste for places that appeared to be wild, untamed, and untouched by man. A visualisation of primitivism and primal nature would increasingly characterise textual constructions of the Caribbean, though this was by no means unique to the Caribbean. Duncan and Gregory suggest that,

Romanticism marked a post-Enlightenment remapping of the space of representation: it dethroned the sovereignty of Reason and glorified unconstrained impulse, individual expression and the creative spirit. It celebrated what Cardinal (1997) calls the 'agitation of personal perception' over objective observation . . . Central to romantic travel was a passion for the wildness of nature, cultural difference, and the desire to be immersed in local colour.

(Duncan and Gregory 1999: 6)

This aesthetic is linked to the rise of the 'sublime' in nature, and the desire to travel to places such as the 'wilderness' of North America or the Lake District in England (Macnaghten and Urry 1998). While Colin Campbell (1987) has shown how the affective self-indulgence and hedonism at play in modern consumerism arose out of currents within European Protestantism, its origins have also been linked to the encounter of Europeans with colonial 'contact zones' (Pratt 1992; Thomas 2000). While it was the rise of this Romantic aesthetic that enabled European travellers to see the wild uncultivated side of the Caribbean in a positive light, the converse could also be argued: that it was the European encounter with the Tropics that fed into the development of the Romantic aesthetic. As I shall show in the following section, this new mode of moving through and envisioning Caribbean landscapes led away from the slave plantation as a picturesque scene, especially given the emerging abolitionist critique of slavery. However, it also revived a pre-Enlightenment discourse of primitive nature and natural resource use, which justified new modes of European and North American intervention in the Caribbean.

Entering paradise: adventure books, military ventures, and Caribbean cruising

If the early modern era denaturalised the Caribbean landscape by appropriating it and turning it into collected and ordered botanical knowledge, the Enlightenment era produced a 'cultured up' nature (Franklin *et al.* 2000) in which the Caribbean was civilised, planted like a garden, and turned into a scene of progress. In the Romantic era, though, much of the Caribbean was again 'renaturalised' as virgin wilds, to become a 'second nature' seemingly 'untouched' by man. In contrast to the eighteenth-century depictions of the most desirable parts of the