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Maria Graham's Tropical Landscaping of Brazilian Independence

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Abstract

This article argues that landscape is an instrument that travel writer and amateur artist and botanist Maria Graham uses to accentuate the momentous changes she witnesses during and after the Brazilian independence movement. Rather than being a background, landscape is a tool with which she inscribes the scene of Brazilian independence. Her self-awareness as a privileged British citizen leads her to champion a political movement that valorizes the mythology of innate British liberty, and landscape serves as an ideal medium through which to channel this conviction. Her 1824 *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* demonstrates a way of looking at South American land that articulates a harmony between its natural and political structures; her construction of the Brazilian landscape orders it so as to align the natural and political environments. At the same time, her work bears witness to the discursive processes that forge the ever-unstable binary oppositions of nature and culture, aesthetics and politics.

Keywords: tropical landscape, picturesque, botany, Brazil, travel writing, British imperialism, nature-culture

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Aesthetics and Politics: Landscape and British Imperialism

In 1824 the genteel Scottish writer Maria Graham (1785-1842) published her *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil*, which situates British landscape discourse in a political context (revolution) and location (Portuguese South America), the novelty of which are striking indeed. The volatile political situation in which Graham found herself suggests that social status and gender do not tell the full story of British landscape in her work[1]—or in other words, that in a foreign context landscape acquires newfound uses and meanings. A centrifugal force, landscape emerges in her writing as a tool for both British diplomacy and Britain's informal empire. By demonstrating how British landscape aesthetics migrated beyond British borders and assimilated Brazil's tropical biodiversity, she gives this aesthetic an imperialist inflection that perpetuates the longstanding assumption that certain kinds of landscapes (Britain's, and now also Brazil's) accommodate and indeed necessitate political liberty. This article analyzes how Graham's support for Brazilian independence infiltrates her landscape descriptions despite her claims of British neutrality. It also assesses how she enlists her botanical and artistic expertise in the service of her political agenda.

Graham's Brazilian landscapes encode her political sensibilities despite the fact that, as a woman, she was technically excluded from the diplomatic negotiations pursued by her husband, Thomas Graham. As captain of *H.M.S. Doris*, he was charged to protect Britain's mercantile interests in South America. In 1821, the Grahams arrived in Pernambuco, in north-western Brazil, in the midst of the nation's independence movement. Graham fully appreciates the momentousness of the events she witnessed, and as a result her *Journal* focuses steadily and urgently on the political developments underway during her visit. In addition, as a writer and amateur artist and botanist, she bears witness to both the natural and political 'wonders' of Brazil, and interprets and intertwines them in sometimes dazzling ways, both visually and verbally. Though beyond the scope of this article, her multi-dimensional identity (writer, artist, botanist) deserves extensive scrutiny; elsewhere, I have touched on this aspect of a different Graham publication, *Journal of a Residence in Chile* (1824) (Jordan, 2019, p. 64-65).[2] In this article, my aim is to evaluate the intersection of landscape aesthetics and British

[1] Graham's proto-feminism has inspired several complimentary studies of her work, which includes publications in art history, children's literature, and about a half-dozen travelogues. For complimentary (though mildly qualified) studies of her travelogues, see for example Pratt, 1991, pp. 155-171; Thompson, 2017, pp. 1-22; and Damián, 2010, pp. 328-40.

[2] Manthorne 2020, p.147-166 and Georgi, 2020, pp. 313-334 offer the most comprehensive assessments of the multiple dimensions of Graham's identity and impact.

imperialism while also exploring how botany operates in Graham's text as an ancillary landscape discourse.

Graham's *Journal* offers an opportunity to observe the appeal of British landscape rhetoric even in contexts outside the British imperium, and thus to demonstrate that imperial landscape operates beyond contexts in which Britain had territorial aspirations. Indeed, the ample and rich scholarship on landscape depictions of the East Indies and the South Seas, for example by Jill Casid and Nigel Leask, has demonstrated the flexibility and effectiveness of this visual 'technology of empire' in places where Britain sought to assert its dominion (Casid, 2005, pp. 1-45; Leask, 2002, p. 166). Meanwhile, research on British contact with the 'New World' has tended to focus on regions that later became part of the British Empire, such as the Caribbean islands, historically called the British West Indies. Less attention has been given to areas such as Brazil, where mercantile interests were the driving force behind the British presence there, and which did not subsequently fall under Britain's imperial aegis. One obvious reason for this relative neglect is that while primary sources written in Britain's colonies in the Caribbean abound, there is a relative paucity of material in English that records British experiences in the Portuguese colony to the south of Britain's thriving sugar empire in the Caribbean. Graham therefore affords us an opportunity to observe how the landscape arts (verbal and visual), a putatively aesthetic realm, is decisively implicated in material (economic and political) negotiations.

Landscaping Brazilian Independence

By virtue of her status as a British naval captain's wife, Graham found herself (and sometimes put herself) in precarious situations that tried her endurance and amply demonstrate that she was a woman of impressive mettle. Even as she describes, often at some length, the momentous events that she witnesses, she also interweaves landscape descriptions whose subtexts express her political orientation. Her *Journal* devotes considerable attention to Brazil's natural beauty and biodiversity, topics to which she brings ample botanical and artistic expertise. These are evidenced in her illustrations published in the *Journal* and in her portfolio of botanical drawings, now housed in the archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, in London.

Figure 1. ***Hibiscus Forcata***

Courtesy of the Archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew

The ostensible separation of aesthetics from other realms, whether economic, political, or scientific, exemplifies the kind of classificatory thinking that emerged during the Enlightenment. Though productive in many ways, this mode of thought also entailed obfuscation as well as illumination. Thus, Garrett Sullivan demonstrates in his history of early modern landscape that the aesthetic appreciation of land—what he calls the 'landscape arts'—effectively disguises or devalues other, typically less elitist, modes of engaging with the land (Sullivan, 1998, p. 1-22). Although my investigation of Graham's *Journal* post-dates Sullivan's objects of inquiry by over a century, her work affirms his argument that any effort to prize apart aesthetic and non-aesthetic treatments of land is decidedly artificial. For present purposes, I use the term 'aesthetic' when referring to perceptions of the beautiful. Keeping in mind the ideological implications of identifying

and elevating a supposedly rarefied realm of aesthetic inquiry, we witness in Graham's *Journal* how such distinctions are not only artificial but also inviable in a context where the acquisition of knowledge is profoundly 'interested.' In other words, her assumption of British cultural superiority and confidence in Britain's system of political 'liberty' demonstrates that even her attention to the beauty of Brazil's natural world is far from neutral.

One significant corollary of the classificatory impulse I am scrutinizing is the weathered 'nature/culture' distinction. The editors of the scholarly edition of the *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil*, Jennifer Hayward and M. Soledad Caballero, exemplify how this bifurcated thinking inflects scholarly perceptions of Graham. They observe that prior to her voyage, Alexander von Humboldt had indelibly marked South America with shades of the "tropical sublime, teeming with raw materials ripe for European exploration and exploitation." They go on to suggest that Graham approaches her subject differently: "Although shaped by th[e] trope of the 'new continent' in the European imagination, Graham also countered it, emphasizing the New World instead as a place of culture, communities, and commerce rather than highlighting only its natural wonders and landscape aesthetics" (Hayward and Caballero, 2010, p. x). The distinction is apt in terms of scope; it makes sense to situate Graham in the context of imperial historiography and to subordinate her ample descriptions of Brazil's flora and fauna to the more contentious categories of history, politics, and cultural engagement. I find their nature/culture opposition tempting to marshal for my own argument (as indeed, I already have) because Graham's writing can in fact be organized in these bifurcated terms. Her book alternates between exploration of the nature she encounters in Brazil and descriptions of the country's political climate in the midst of historic change.

Without minimizing the significance of Hayward and Caballero's invaluable scholarly edition, then, I question the validity of the nature/culture distinction that they use to distinguish Graham's representation of Brazil. More specifically, I argue that landscape aesthetics in fact serves as a barometer by which to assess the political and historical transformations that the *Journal* captures. Prioritizing this feature of the text may help us to understand the role that landscape played in those transformations. Landscape, then, is an instrument that Graham uses to accentuate the momentous changes she witnesses. It is not the background for, but instead a tool with which, she inscribes the scene of Brazilian independence. As we will see, her self-awareness as a privileged British citizen leads her to champion a political movement that in her view valorizes the mythology of innate British liberty, and landscape serves as an ideal medium through which to channel this conviction.

When Graham marshals the landscape aesthetic in the course of narrating Brazil's progress toward independence, she assimilates the rebellious colony within the fold of the British Empire, though certainly not in the sense of effecting military conquest. Rather, her descriptions of Brazilian land forge an aesthetic affinity between Britain and a fellow constitutional monarchy in South America, as Brazil would become once Dom Pedro deemed it advantageous to reject the absolutist government led by his father Dom João VI in Portugal. Graham's sympathetic disposition toward Brazil is no doubt a consequence of the unique bond between Britain and the Portuguese empire; her affinity for the colony would have been highly unlikely had it not been preceded by centuries-long economic and political cooperation between Britain and Portugal. As Hayward and Caballero explain, this bond was decisively strengthened in 1808, when British warships escorted the entire Portuguese court to Brazil as it retreated from Napoleon's invading armies (Hayward and Caballero, 2010, pp. xxviii-xxxv). Britain thereafter negotiated extremely advantageous trade agreements with the colony, and as we will see, Graham herself journeys to Brazil as part of a naval effort to protect British property and trading interests there. And in her *Journal*, she demonstrates a way of looking at South American land that articulates a harmony between its natural and political structures. Her construction of the Brazilian landscape orders it so as to align the natural and political environments.

Latin American Struggles for Independence: Brazil and Chile

Let us consider, then, the basic circumstances of Graham's journey to South America. She accompanied her first husband Thomas when he led a mission to protect British mercantile interests amidst the independence movements roiling both Brazil and Chile. The Grahams and their crew spent three months in Brazil in late 1821 and early 1822, during which time the independence movement there grew increasingly volatile. In March 1822, they sailed to Chile, where independence had already been achieved but needed British reinforcements to negotiate on-going skirmishes with forces still loyal to the Spanish crown. Captain Graham, however, unexpectedly died while en route, leaving his wife bereft and yet resolved to live abroad independently without the institutional sanction of the British Navy. After spending nine months in Chile, she returned to Brazil on her way back to England and lived for another seven months in the new nation.

While she was away in Chile, Brazil achieved independence, with Dom Pedro issuing a decisive declaration in September 1822. Upon her return in March 1823, she observed the nation in its infancy and established closer connections than had been possible for a British Captain's wife, a position which had obliged her to uphold Britain's official policy of strict neutrality. Hayward and Caballero point out that as a widow in Brazil, "Graham is

able to go anywhere and socialize with whom she pleases; she seems liberated to observe the country in a more immediate and direct way" (Hayward and Caballero, 2010, p. xxiv). The fact that Graham's Brazilian encounter is bifurcated by a twelve-month hiatus traveling and living elsewhere gives her *Journal* a two-part structure. Not only does this invite comparisons between the first and second parts but it also reveals, as the editors point out, that "without the buffer of the British naval community, [Graham's] self-consciously English identity was less strongly reinforced" (Hayward and Caballero, 2010, p. xxiv). As we will see, this temporal distance between parts one and two registers in the tenor of Graham's landscape descriptions.

Careful attention to landscape description in the first part of Graham's *Journal* reveals that in rendering Brazil's dazzling new vistas, she also inscribes her own Englishness. Consider the following passage, in which she marvels at the sights during her first trip onto Brazilian shores. She notes that in Pernambuco:

> Nothing can be prettier of its kind than the fresh green landscape, with its broad river winding through it, which is seen on each hand from the bridge, and the white buildings of the treasury and mint, the convents, and private houses, most of which have gardens. The verdure is delightful to an English eye; and I doubt not that the flat meadows, and slowly-flowing water, were particularly attractive to the Dutch founders of Recife (Graham, 2010, p. 36).

An English standard of beauty operates in this passage, where the verdure, meadow, and winding river—typical features in descriptions of English landscape—impress Graham by reminding her of home. As I have suggested, her narrative rendering of the landscape, filtered through her English taste, exemplifies a technique that I call aesthetic assimilation. By identifying features in the landscape that please her the same way they do at home, Graham effects a kind of aesthetic ownership. Pernambuco may not be English territory, but by asserting that it resembles England in certain respects, she makes it more amenable to the independence movement that she clearly favours despite her assertions of British neutrality. Brazil is primed, in effect, to achieve a version of English liberty.

Because Graham is heir to a time-honoured British literary tradition that invests land with symbolic resonances of liberty—whether of the factional Whig or Tory variety—she perceives Brazil through a sensibility that associates certain kinds of landscapes with certain political values. Indeed, in the British discourse of landscape, political subtexts are virtually axiomatic. As James Turner, Stephen Bending, and Elizabeth Helsinger (among others) have variously argued, Britain's political structure valorises and reproduces the

values of its landed aristocracy, in effect making any representation of land ripe for political embellishment (Turner, 1979; Bending, 1998, p. 241-266; Helsinger, 1997, p. 12-35).

The Privileges of the British Subject: Danger and Verdure

A single reference to English verdure does not, on its own, sustain an argument for Graham's aesthetic assimilation of Brazil. Yet, the context in which she inserts her landscape description leads one to appreciate why she feels compelled to contemplate the verdant scenery amid political upheaval. My insistence, therefore, on a politically encoded aesthetic may be more persuasive when one considers the particularly urgent state of siege in which the *H.M.S. Doris* crew finds Pernambuco upon their arrival. Before describing the landscape, Graham spends several pages detailing recent events. She bases her account on the one that was delivered on board her ship by the Royalist "Colonel Patronhe, the governor's aide-de-camp" (Graham, 2010, p. 31). A visit from such a powerful figure (not to mention her meeting with the governor himself two days later) serves as a reminder that Graham has encountered a diplomatic mission and is not merely a leisured traveller. Conveying the Colonel's news, she observes that about a month prior, a 600-man patriot militia had assembled to establish a constitutional junta, and just the night before her arrival they had attacked the Royalist governor's forces but were repulsed. Fourteen patriots (proponents of independence) died and thirty-five more were taken prisoner.

These facts, and the array of important officials who greet the *Doris* crew and acquaint them with this state of affairs, testify to the urgency of the situation and to the stature of Graham's party. Moreover, she offers evidence that the British community in Olinda (the capital of Pernambuco) provides shelter and security for the alarmed townspeople: "Most people who have property of value, in plate or jewels, have packed it up and lodged it in the houses of the English merchants. Many persons with their wives and families have left their homes in the out-skirts of the town, and have taken refuge with the English" (Graham, 2010, p. 32). Graham's access to the most important officials in the region, and her compatriots' provision of security and sanctuary, amount to a portrait of British stability in the midst of a (former) colony on the brink of chaos. Yet Graham faces these circumstances with striking fearlessness. She dismisses the Colonel's warning about "the uncertainty of the next attack," thus revealing her sense of invulnerability as a British subject. Instead of heeding his warning, she declares, "I had never seen a town in a state of siege, and therefore resolved to go ashore" (2010, p. 33).

The entire episode detailing Graham's first experiences in Brazil modulates in this way between anxiety and visual pleasure. A page after alerting readers that, "every thing, in short, is alarm and uncertainty," she undertakes a detailed and lengthy explanation of the complex geography and hydraulics of the unusual harbor of Recife, the coral reef of which her party must navigate in order to reach the shore (Graham, 2010, p. 32). Having described the general layout of the capital's several neighbourhoods—Olinda, Recife, Sant Antonio, Boa Vista—she avers, "All this I knew before I landed, and thought I was pretty well prepared for Pernambuco. But no previous knowledge could do away the wonder with which one must enter that very extraordinary port" (2010, p. 34). The capacity to take in such wonders, and record them in minute detail like the sixteen feet of water over the sandbar at the entrance to the harbor, attests to Graham's assurance that her nationality protects her and indeed, frees her to explain why, exactly, "The reef is certainly one of the wonders of the world" (2010, p. 35). Wonder and similar emotions, especially awe, are the hallmarks of the sublime, and tend to arise from a fear of disorder; but because Graham so often observes the beauty of Brazil's natural environment, her *Journal* instead produces a sense of order more often linked to the picturesque.

Graham's privilege as a British citizen hovers as a silent subtext behind various descriptions of her party's encounters with Royalist officialdom. Not least among these privileges is the freedom to have her own opinion about the events she is watching unfold. Indeed, her several professions of neutrality during the course of the episode are belied by subtle slips in her language and by private correspondence in which she openly avows her sympathy for the rebel cause. Her *Journal* notes that Colonel Patronhe asks her husband to convey official letters from the Royalists to a British packet bound for Portugal, prompting her to comment: "We felt glad that the strict rules of service prevented the captain from giving any such order to the master of the packet. It would be at once a breach of that neutrality we profess to observe, and, in my opinion, an aiding of the worst cause" (2010, p. 33). Graham has no interest in performing favours for the Royalist government, and indeed, in a letter to her publisher John Murray, she writes, "I confess I wish our orders had been such as allowed us to take part with the *changers* for I have heard such things within 24 hours of the old regime that I am sure any change must be for the better. […] I imagine our being here to protect the British property will awe both sides a little" (2010, p. xxvii). The sense of indomitability she derives from belonging to a British naval mission explains her fearless decision to go ashore despite warnings of an imminent attack.

This fearlessness, I would argue, is of a piece with the blithe manner in which Graham moves from a comment about Royalist fortifications in one sentence to a breathless rhapsody about a verdant meadow in the next. Immediately prior to the passage in

question, in which she savours the verdure "delightful to an English eye," she observes that upon attempting to cross the bridge from Sant Antonio to Boa Vista, "we found that it had been cut through the middle, and is only now passable by means of two planks easily withdrawn, in case the besiegers should get possession of Boa Vista" (2010, p. 37). The incongruity between a bridge cut to ward off attack and the claim that "Nothing can be prettier of its kind than the fresh green landscape" may be jarring to modern readers who fail to register the extent of Graham's invulnerability as the wife of a British naval officer. What I am suggesting, however, is that Graham's subjectivity as a British citizen and a product of Britain's pervasive landscape rhetoric equips her to record military manoeuvres and aesthetic pleasure with equal composure.

We would do well to consider an alternative approach to Graham's interaction with Brazilians as she encounters representatives of both sides of the independence movement. Rather than treating her as bringing her pre-conceived notions of liberty to the scene of conflict, we might instead explore her behaviour in terms of dwelling, as theorized by Tim Ingold (2011). To apply this perspective to Graham involves the notion that her mode of being-in-the-world creates that world as she moves through it. In this way, her modes of being, which involve particular gendered and classed expressions of that being, lead her to behave in the new environment of Brazil with certain assumptions. As a genteel woman who has learned the habits and manners inculcated in someone of her stature, she assumes the environment she enters, even though it is unknown to her, still does not present a threat that would inhibit her determination to see this unprecedented set of circumstances for herself.

British Imperialism and the Brazilian Picturesque

Graham makes levelling gestures throughout her sojourn in Pernambuco, treating aesthetics and politics with similar aplomb. During her first excursion beyond the Royalist lines around the capital, for example, she encounters a patriot outpost and is escorted by an armed guide to the next guardhouse; with typical poise she observes that,

> [H]e threatened to shoot us if we attempted to ride faster than he walked. The slow pace at which we advanced gave us leisure to remark the beauties of a Brazilian spring. Gay plants, with birds still gayer hovering over them, sweet smelling flowers, and ripe oranges and citrons, formed a beautiful fore-ground to the very fine forest-trees that cover the plains, and clothe the sides of the low hills in the neighbourhood of Pernambuco. (Graham, 2010, p. 49)

Turning the menace of the guard's blunderbuss into an opportunity to savour the region's botanical splendour, Graham performs in this passage her penchant for turning moments of danger into picturesque tableaux (if we understand 'the picturesque' as an aesthetic technique that turns natural scenery into a picture).[3] Such manoeuvres suggest that she may be oblivious to the danger; it is as if her eagerness to compose natural elements into foreground and background blinds her to the subtler details of the Independence conflict. At the same time, the passage also captures Graham moving through the landscape and engaging with it in a multi-sensory way. Noting the smell of the flowers and fruit, and observing the visual beauty of the birds and the forest, she demonstrates an aesthetic sensibility here that exceeds the picturesque insofar as it animates non-visual aspects of her experience.

Graham's narrative practice thus levels military and aesthetic concerns, treating them as equally note-worthy. Though her sympathy for Independence is not explicit in her interaction with the guard, it comes closer to the surface when, a few sentences later, she explains that "a gentlemanlike young officer, of the Brazilian Caçadores [riflemen], rode with us, and entertained us by calling [Governor] Luis do Rego a tyrant" (Graham, 2010, p. 49). That she finds the officer's comment "entertaining" implies her sympathy for his perspective; presumably she would have taken offence had she felt loyal to the Governor's cause. Graham's calm disposition throughout the excursion into rebel territory lulls the reader into perceiving the rebel cause with equanimity. Under her gaze, the patriot tactics acquire the naturalness of gay birds and "sweet smelling flowers." The Brazilian scene thus emerges as naturally ripe for independence; occasional irruptions of violence do not subdue the land's capacity to generate peaceful and beautiful reveries, just as the British landscape does.

Thus far we have seen how Graham's appropriation of picturesque aesthetics works in the service of a pro-Independence subtext, and at this juncture it is necessary to address how she modulates this aesthetic once she is no longer affiliated with the British navy, and what subtext rises to the surface and becomes explicit. However, it is essential to situate Graham's picturesque in relation to other British writers who also exported this effective technique for synthesizing foreign lands for a British spectator's gaze. A key factor here is that unlike Australia, and India, and British West Indian territories, which generated significant examples of what we might call the 'colonial picturesque,' Brazil did not of course belong to the British Empire, and indeed its inclusion in what imperial

[3] Manthorne has recently argued that Graham's "ability to combine her on-site drawings with text facilitated her appropriation of Brazilian scenery into the aesthetic category of the Picturesque" (Manthorne, 2020, p.160).

historians call the "informal empire" is a matter of some debate.[4] Brazilian land therefore does not operate in a visual economy in the same way that Jamaican plantations or Hindu temples materialize in travel narratives and memoirs written about Britain's colonial periphery. Writers and artists (and it's important to recall that Graham was both) who visited Jamaica, Madras, or Queensland, Australia, tended to see these lands through a lens of ownership; indeed, one reason the picturesque was so suitable to the British colonial context was that it first emerged in England as an aesthetic discourse that naturalized a political and economic system based on the ownership and cultivation of rural land. As Elizabeth Bohls explains in reference to early articulations of the picturesque, "Looking at landscape becomes a paradigmatic mental exercise in ownership" (Bohls, 1995, p. 87).

With some modification the picturesque could be handily re-purposed to naturalize the plantation economy, making it continuous with the British agrarian economy. Yet it is important to distinguish Graham's picturesque rhetoric from the versions of this discourse that Tim Barringer, for example, traces in his study of artistic and literary representations of plantations in the West Indian territories (Barringer, 2007, pp. 41-61). Because possession is not the primary impetus behind Graham's presence in Brazil, her landscapes do not signify in the same semiotic chain of ownership that one sees in such texts as William Beckford's 1790 *Descriptive Account of Jamaica* (Barringer, 2007, p. 41-61) or Janet Schaw's unpublished *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (Bohls, 1995, p. 46-65). Considerable creative energy in these texts goes into occluding the realities of slavery. In the *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil*, by contrast, Graham persistently condemns the slave markets and other Brazilian sites of an institution that she considers abhorrent.[5] However, when she turns her gaze upon a particularly striking vista, the gesture most often serves to underscore and to ornament Brazil's emergence as an independent nation. The effect of her picturesque landscapes, then, is to celebrate the land's enormous potential to realize what she invokes at one point as "the principles of freedom and greatness" (Graham, 2010, p. 154).

Nigel Leask notes that the technique of blending the appearances of geographically remote locations is typical of the picturesque aesthetic. He explains, "Given that the picturesque already represented the British landscape in an exotic, Italianate idiom, it was particularly suitable for blending the aesthetic qualities of tropical with temperate landscapes in the Indian context" (Leask, 2002, p. 166). Leask refers here to Graham's

[4] Hayward and Caballero observe (2010, p. xix, note 9), with some scepticism, that Neill Macaulay (1986) does not see Brazil as part of England's informal empire.

[5] The topic of slavery in the *Journal* deserves its own separate article. For the most comprehensive discussion of Graham's treatment of the institution, see Caballero 2015, p. 55-67.

Journal of a Residence in India (1812), but his explanation also illuminates her comparison of the Boa Vistan meadow to "English verdure." Pervasive allusions in landscape description constitute a way for writers (and artists like Graham) to make a space legible by linking it to aspects of their cultural heritage, which serves the dual function of enriching a scene's emotional resonance while also performing the writer's aesthetic—literary or artistic—knowledgeability.

Courting the Brazilian Imperial Court

A close look at Graham's forays into the imperial court in Rio de Janeiro demonstrates how she uses landscape description to express her political sympathies. As in the revealing juxtaposition of military manoeuvring and picturesque reverie in Part One of the *Journal*, in Part Two she uses the picturesque to shade the political narrative with her own personal investments. The most significant political development to emerge in the distance between Part One and Part Two is that Dom Pedro has broken with the metropolitan government in Lisbon. Upon her return to Rio in Part Two, Graham carefully traces the ceremonial inauguration of the new empire. She notes that certain regions remote from the capital continue to resist the imposition of a Brazilian imperial government, but writes about the new regime with confidence and affection. Indeed, she appeals to one of its most prominent ministers for protection:

> [A]s a stranger here, and situated as I am, I was peculiarly unprotected, and therefore I spoke to the minister José Bonifacio, telling him my feelings; and saying, that from the amiable character of the Empress, I should wish to be allowed to wait on her, and to consider her as protecting me while I remain in the empire (Graham, 2010, p. 177).

The loss of her husband has not brought a loss in stature for Graham; rather, it prompts her to appeal for succour from the court and, as we learn elsewhere in the text, to socialize more regularly with the Brazilian nobility.

An example of the aesthetic assimilation that is typical of Graham's traveling persona occurs in the progression from the end of the entry for May 3 to the subsequent entry for May 6, 1823. The first of these records the Emperor's procession from the imperial palace and arrival in state at the opening of the Constituent and Legislative Assembly. After detailing the momentous event with descriptions of the finery on display and a twelve-page transcript of the Emperor's inaugural address, she concludes with an account of the elite's celebratory night at the opera. The entry closes with a scene of sentimental

communion as both the Emperor and Graham are overcome with emotion when an after-piece unexpectedly concludes with a *deus ex machina* bearing the Imperial standard. The next entry begins as follows:

> May 6th—To-day I rode to [the imperial palace at] San Cristóvão, through a very beautiful country. The palace, which once belonged to a convent, is placed upon a rising ground, and is built rather in the Moresco style, and coloured yellow with white mouldings. It has a beautiful screen, a gateway of Portland stone, and the court is planted with weeping willows; so that a group of great beauty is formed in the bosom of a valley, surrounded by high and picturesque mountains, the chief of which is the Beco do Perroquito. The view from the palace opens to part of the bay, over an agreeable plain flanked by fertile hills, one of which is crowned by the very handsome barracks that were once a Jesuit establishment (2010, p. 175).

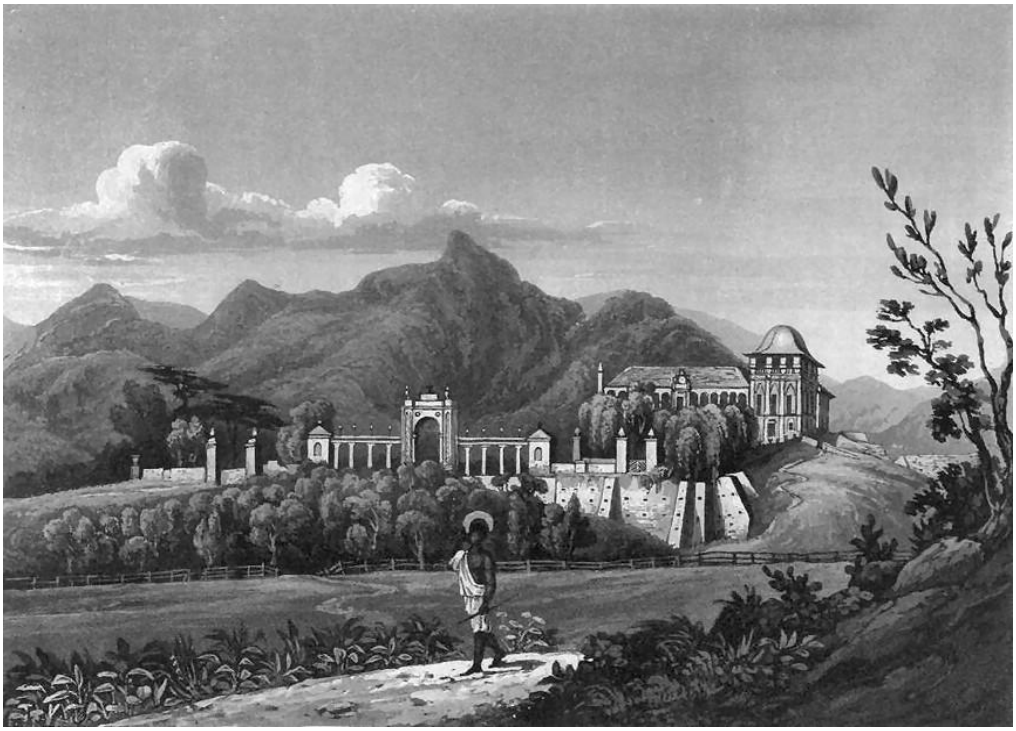
The detailed description serves to realize the ambitions expressed in the previous entry; the grandeur of the palace, flanked by a majestic gate and nestled among "high and picturesque mountains," reads almost as a direct response to the opera audience crying, "Viva o Emperador!" Graham structures her narrative so as to suggest that with an imperial seat such as this, the Emperor will naturally thrive. Paying careful attention to foreground and background, she composes the scene using picturesque conventions that situate the palace in harmony with the natural environment. With a view overlooking Guanabara Bay, the Emperor and his seat (metonymically linked in this image) command the scene as they command the nation.

A telling coda to this moment occurs some two months later when Graham opens a July entry thus: "I had for some time promised to paint a sketch of San Cristóvão for the Empress, and to-day I resolved to carry it to her" (Graham, 2010, p. 191).

With the drawing itself printed alongside the text, Graham shows readers how her art helps to ingratiate herself with the court. Bolstered by the many descriptions of landscape—far too many to discuss them all here—Graham's illustrated *Journal* thus makes Brazilian land an essential element of the emergent nation. The scene is striking, too, for the way it stages what we might call an affirmation of ownership. Whereas Graham has not drawn property that she herself owns, she has provided the newly crowned Empress with such a drawing, and in effect valorizes her (and implicitly her husband's)

sovereignty over the land depicted in the drawing.[6] (Equally noteworthy, though beyond the scope of my discussion, is the enslaved Black man in the drawing's foreground; Graham's silence about this figure signals how she has become inured to the presence of enslaved people.)

Figure 2. ***Palace of San Cristóvão***



Courtesy of The Catholic University of America, Oliveira Lima, Library, Washington, D.C.

British Authority: Colonial Botany in the Brazilian Landscape

In scenes such as this one, Graham strives to establish herself as a learned, refined, and upright visitor, prompting Caballero to observe (also with reference to Graham's *Journal of a Residence in Chile)* that, "Her texts structure British economic contact as an infusion of British civilisation and progress whose primary agents are gentility and manners rather than as the conquest of land and the extraction of raw resources" (Caballero, 2005, p.112). Noting a brief attempt at territorial conquest in 1810, Caballero details how Britain then shifted its energies toward gaining economic advantage in Latin American, a strategy whose dependence on strict political neutrality was complicated by the enlistment of

[6] The Palace of San Cristóvão eventually became (after multiple renovations) the National Museum of Brazil. In a tragic accident, the Palace and most of the archives it housed were destroyed by fire in September 2018.

prominent British naval officers in the service of both Chilean and Brazilian independence. Lord Thomas Cochrane, for example, achieved heroic stature in Britain through decisive defeats of Napoleon's fleets, and went on to generate considerable controversy by turning 'mercenary' when he accepted Chilean and Brazilian invitations to lead their newly independent navies. Caballero identifies him as the chief figure in a "romance of benign domination" (as she labels Graham's Latin American *Journals*). Quoting his letters to her and others in the *Journals*, and charting his successes against the Royalists with a sense of shared triumph, Graham insinuates that Latin American independence follows the British model and would not have been possible without contributions like those of Cochrane and (though with protestations of modesty) herself.

Botanical knowledge also figures in Graham's depiction of Brazil, though not in as much depth as witnessed in her unpublished letters and drawings. Her botanical endeavours overlap with the discourse of landscape while not being quite the same thing. Assessing the mutually reinforcing roles of landscape and botany in Graham's *Journal* exemplifies how landscape is refracted in the service of empire, especially in the New World context so rife with biodiversity. The instrumental role of Graham's landscape descriptions proves more subtle than her discussions of botany, but their shared implication in her imperialist project becomes clearer once we study the intricacies of botanical inquiry. Indeed, aesthetics converges with other modes of knowledge in a particularly striking manner in her depictions of Brazil's flora, thus revealing her participation in colonial botany. Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swann delineate this realm of inquiry by challenging claims in the historiography of early modern botany that locate its emergence alongside "taxonomy, standardized nomenclature, and 'pure' systems of classification." They emphasize instead how botany is decisively implicated in the economic and political negotiations that drive empire building: "Botanists transferred plants from garden to garden around the world, building inventories and stocks of natural goods and thus facilitating the study, cultivation, and experimentation with profitable plants from all parts of the globe" (Schiebinger and Swann, 2005, p. 2, p. 13). Graham does not discuss her botanical drawings in the *Journal*; yet, its botanical descriptions demonstrate specialized knowledge that informs the correspondence she was to carry on with William Hooker, a professor of botany at the University of Glasgow, who went on to serve as Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Graham participated in a complex process that involved an array of agents, including maritime surveyors, traveling natural historians, and botanists employed by trade companies and monarchs. According to Luciana Martins and Felix Driver, early nineteenth-century advances in natural history led to transformations in the visual processes entailed in artistic and scientific representation. The increasing prevalence of

open-air painting expressed a more naturalistic approach to the new places and peoples encountered in exploratory voyages around the world. Science thus serves as a crucial context for the emergence of new modes of visualization (Martins and Driver, 2005, p. 59-74.) As one scholar asserts, the "detailed examination of landscapes was one of the most fundamental aspects of natural history; instruction manuals usually taught their readers how to see, gather, and record objects that conveyed a sense of an area's particular natural features and characteristics."[7] Although Graham did not formally study these new methods, she did assume some of their practices, including drawing *in situ*.

Often when describing an outing, she surveys the distance covered, provides relevant background for the site if so inclined, perhaps mentions her guide or host, and then takes the opportunity to sketch a scene or certain remarkable objects therein. Even in the midst of a military stand-off in Pernambuco, she suggests she would have drawn the scenery if she could:

> I was sorry I had no means of sketching any part of the beautiful landscape, which, besides the striking features I have mentioned before, now displayed a broad river, over which there is a white stone bridge of several arches; at one end, a large house, more like a palace, with its arches and corridors, and the encampment of the army and the horse picquets, and, in short, a bustle and animation that seldom happen to adorn so fine a scene (Graham, 2010, p. 50).

Graham's experience of lacking the tools to sketch the scene as she habitually would suggests that she understands her circumstances as calling for a visual re-creation thereof. In other words, her perception of the scenes she encounters privilege the visual. Given the fact that the *Journal* consists in representations, both visual and verbal, it does not lend itself to non-representational theories of landscape. Indeed, it presents something of a puzzle for scholars keen to bring such theories to bear on Graham's work. Nevertheless, a moment such as this one calls attention to her visual orientation and leads one to wonder what might be left out when visuality serves as the primary mode of encounter. I will have occasion to consider non-representational approaches to her work when I turn to her botanical oeuvre.

At the same time, the visual orientation that typifies Graham's approach is not necessarily simple. One challenge for European artists and scientists visiting the tropics entailed accommodating the conventions they had acquired at home to utterly new conditions.

[7] Anne Larsen, quoted. in Martins and Driver (2005, p. 65).

Thus, Luciana Martins explains, "The depiction of the colours, scale, atmosphere and light of the tropics in the work of travelling artists […] required a series of difficult negotiations between European aesthetic conventions and the experience of traversing the field, especially under tropical skies" (Martins, 2004, p. 74). Though the drawings published in the *Journal* retain many aspects of the picturesque, which Martins treats as giving way at this time to more naturalistic styles of representation, Graham's portfolio of botanical drawings undoubtedly partakes of the less stylized and more naturalist approach to which Martins refers (Martins, 2004, p. 75).[8] Some drawings have the polished appearance of a finished product, while others are working sketches, covered with notes and smaller drawings of, for example, a seed pod in cross-section and in various stages of opening.

Despite my previous claims about the challenges of undertaking nonrepresentational approaches to a representation, we may nevertheless make non-visual inferences about Graham's drawing process. For instance, the accretion of detail in the sketch, and the multi-dimensional approach, which includes a profile perspective on the nectary as well as a diagram itemizing its several parts (numbered one though four), suggests an effort to capture the non-visual aspects of her object of study. Next to a close-up sketch of the nectary (to the right of her cross-section drawing of the green seed), she writes, "nectary, one of which is placed behind each small flower & of which a great bundle form a sort of lip. I could not count the Nº on account of the stretchiness of the gum." This attention to the texture of the nectary—its stretchiness—activates the haptic dimension of the flower. From a different perspective, moreover, the busy-ness of the page—the way that the writing in pencil surrounds the green-coloured drawings which are quite delicate—captures something of the temporality of Graham's engagement with the plant. The permanence and greater visibility of the green, combined with the faintness of the pencilled writing, capture the *process* of knowledge acquisition. These forms of representation (drawing, writing) cannot occur simultaneously, and thus as a whole, the page suggests the passage of time as Graham engages in one form and then another. The contrast between green drawing and grey pencilled writing conveys the different instruments she uses.

[8] Ana Maria Belluzzo also discusses the picturesque aspects of Graham's *Journal* drawings, noting in particular her fondness for "rocky perspectives [and] sudden cliffs," and her use of the *repoussoir* typical of picturesque art (Belluzo, 2007, p. 45-7).

Figure 3. ***Untitled (from Portfolio Rio de Janeiro)***

Courtesy of the Archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew

Such drawings aim for accuracy rather than conformity to a pre-existing aesthetic tradition. Some of Graham's other drawings situate precise botanical detail within a broader context, as in a depiction of Heliconia, which features a prominent image of the plant in the foreground, and in the distant background, on a much smaller scale, the lagoon and Corcovado Mountain**.** Of this image, Martins and Driver note, "The point of view is low; it seems that Graham was kneeling when she sketched the image, as if in reverence" (Martins & Driver, 2005, p. 69). Superimposing botanical drawing onto a landscape depiction, Graham thus offers a pictorial rendition of the narrative technique that she employs elsewhere in the *Journal*, whereby a catalogue of specialized plant

names embellishes a larger landscape that also includes a broader view of Rio's botanic garden and the adjacent powder-works (Graham, 2010, p. 37).

As Graham's upbringing in Scotland and England attests, she was a seasoned traveller by the time she visited Brazil, with intellectual and personal skills that equipped her for further botanical study with prominent professionals in the field (Hayward & Caballero, 2010, p. xii-xvii). Her letters to Hooker, written upon her return to England in 1824 and from Brazil in 1825, reveal a concern for accuracy and an indifference to the physical discomfort that plant collecting could entail. Indeed, given the loss of her husband and her own physical suffering from symptoms of tuberculosis (which she describes in the *Journal* as coming and going), she proves a resilient and intrepid traveller. In the following excerpt, written in Rio in June 1825, she explains to Hooker her enthusiasm and its limitations:

> I am not quite strong enough to seek for plants as I would, & every body here has other business—but the Number & variety of palms would be interesting to you. I am also very ignorant –but I will not be negligent & I think I may be of use in exciting other people to be busy.—I am very very fond of plants and sensible neither [of] muddy feet nor torn clothes for their sake--& I will watch [illegible] seeds–those one buys here are often old & sometimes fictitious–what I gather myself I can answer for.[9]

Graham writes as a well-practiced collector, who knows which methods work, which seeds are authentic, and how to cajole more able-bodied acquaintances to perform what she cannot do herself.

Graham's reference to "muddy feet [and] torn clothes" offers a rare window into the multi-sensory dimension of her experience in Brazil. Unlike her copious observations about the beauty of the natural environment, here we witness details that call attention to the embodied experience of moving through the Brazilian landscape. Indeed, her claims of indifference to these sensory experiences present a hardiness that complicates conventions of femininity that, although she never lays claim to them, still would apply to any woman of her time.

[9] Maria Graham to William Hooker, 11 April 1824. MS. Directors' Correspondence, Vol. 43, Folio 49. Royal Botanic Gardens, London.

Science and/as Aesthetics: Botany and Landscape

The letter exemplifies Graham's participation in the acquisition of scientific knowledge, situating her among the small but increasing number of female participants in a realm that typically excluded them (Shteir, 1996). Graham's correspondence with William Hooker reveals details about her pursuit of scientific knowledge, and when read alongside her *Journal,* these texts give the impression of someone with impressive curiosity, intelligence, and resilience. When she returned to England in December 1823 to gather materials for her new position as governess to the imperial princesses, she also wrote to Hooker, offering her services in specimen collection upon her return to Brazil. Prior to returning there in July 1824, she made specific suggestions as to how she might be of service: "Pray in case of the fading of the colors of said specimens might it not be advisable for me to add rough col^{d} sketches,—say, just an outline with the real color of a petal and a leaf? –I do not habitually draw flowers but I could do that—and also any peculiar form of seed &c.—Only let me know how I can be useful & I will try to be so" (Graham to W. Hooker, 1824, MS. Directors' Correspondence, Vol. 43, Folio 20). Based on the evidence of the "Portfolio Rio de Janeiro," Graham proved an adept botanical illustrator, who produced specimen and drawings sufficient to make Hooker include her in the lists of plant collectors that he appended to his periodical articles, and for several other botanists to recognize her contributions in print (Hagglund, 2011, p. 50-51).

Consistent observations of beauty mark Graham's letters to Hooker, introducing an aesthetic dimension to an epistolary relationship driven primarily by scientific inquiry. The superimposed aesthetic and instrumentalist dimensions of botany in these letters link them to the discourse of landscape, wherein observations of beauty are axiomatic. A typical description of her endeavours intermingles comments about the soil conditions and location where she collected the plants with assertions of their beauty:

> I sent home by the Ansons Frigate a parcel addressed to Mrs. Palgrave containing twenty two varieties of Fern all growing between my cottage in the Lasengeiras [?] & the top of the Corcovado or granite rock 1700 ft high. There is granite [illegible] all mouldering so as to make the most fertile soil possible. The ferns were all in blossom or seed whichever it may be called if there are none <u>new</u> they are at least beautiful and maybe new as inhabitants of this country. I was watching the blossoming of ten or twelve others and hope to succeed in preserving them. I also sent the only very well dried plant I had besides which is very beautiful both in leaf and flower that I am sure you must be pleased.—I have an idea it is <u>Jungia</u> I have since

> got a head of seed (Graham to W. Hooker, 30 June 1825. MS. Directors' Correspondence Vol. 43, folio 49).

One may discern in this passage an image of Graham climbing the heights of the Corcovado, observing (and drawing) her findings, and effectively rendering herself a part of the landscape. Later in the same letter, she mentions a tree used for making ships' masts:

> About a stone's throw from my house there is the largest tree near Rio de Janeiro. The natives call it Jiquitiba & it is preferred to all others here for masts of ships. It grows to 100 feet high and the spread of its branches is in proportion—I cannot find that any botanist has seen or [illegible] it. Luckily it is now flowering –& though it was supposed impossible to get at the flower a few [illegible] and a great deal of pains has produced a branch which I am drying after drawing it very carefully (Graham to W. Hooker, 30 June 1825).

As with previous plant descriptions, Graham demonstrates a drive to learn all that she can, and she suggests here that she made an extraordinary effort to acquire a branch with flowers so that she could draw and then dry them. Locating the tree "about a stone's throw from [her] house," she goes on to offer other details about her proximity to the species she studies:

> The other day a thunderstorm flooded my parlour--& for three days my mountain was so high I had no communication with the rest of the world. — However I <u>will</u> make you envious: in the first place my cottage is known by its <u>Tree</u> the <u>Cratoeoa</u> or garlic pear, the largest and finest I ever saw—it has not blossomed since I came though (Graham to W. Hooker, 30 June 1825).

In passages such as these, Graham conveys her enthusiasm to Hooker, her willingness to do almost anything to achieve her goals, and in some cases her sense of triumph in a new discovery ("I cannot find that any botanist has seen […] it").

This article has sought to interpret the role of landscape and botany in Maria Graham's *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* and in unpublished correspondence that further illuminates her participation in colonial botany and the discourse of picturesque landscape more broadly. Her studied modulation between sympathetic portraits of rebellious and then newly independent Brazil and its aestheticized landscapes demonstrates how an aesthetic that typically asserts ownership morphs into vicarious Brazilian patriotism. Rather than valorising British land, as it originally had, the picturesque expands in

Graham's *Journal* into an idiom that celebrates non-British land whose value increases as its beauty encodes political freedom. In addition to the jingoistic undertones of Graham's portrait of Brazil and its rulers, her work demonstrates how colonial botany figures into the processes of nation building, and how the landscape way of seeing forges informal diplomatic relations among like-minded adherents of constitutional liberty. When we assess the political implications of Graham's reliance on landscape, then, her contributions to a much larger, and longer, process of de-colonization prove especially compelling. The following line from Graham's "Sketch of the History of Brazil" (appended to her *Journal*) exemplifies how, even while glossing Brazil's recent colonial past (specifically 1811), she links botanical knowledge and its implementation to her political ideals: "A botanical garden had been formed, in which the spices of the East were cultivated with success; and perhaps as the greatest possible good, a public library had been formed, and its regulations framed on the most liberal principles" (Graham, 2010, p. 299).[10]

[10] See Jordan (2020), p. 42-52.

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