

Comparative Analysis: South vs Landscape Painter, Jamaica

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Introduction

Kamau Brathwaite's *South* and Vivian Virtue's *Landscape Painter, Jamaica* both present Caribbean landscape as a source of identity and belonging. Brathwaite writes from the perspective of displacement, remembering the islands and longing to return to the sea that shaped him. Virtue writes through the figure of a painter, celebrating the Jamaican landscape as alive, elusive, and resistant to capture. Both poems treat landscape as more than scenery, but Brathwaite's landscape is recovered through memory and longing, while Virtue's is encountered through artistic observation.

Central shared theme: nature, place, and Caribbean identity, especially how landscape becomes a living source of belonging, memory, and cultural pride.

Landscape as identity

Both poems connect place to the self.

In *South*, the speaker says he was born by the shores and that "life heaved and breathed" in him with the strength of the island's "turbulent soil." The **personification** makes the land seem alive and active, as if the island itself gives him identity. The sea is not simply a setting; it is the source of who he is.

In *Landscape Painter, Jamaica*, the landscape also has life and personality. The hills, light, and natural details are not passive objects. They seem to participate in the painter's work, offering beauty while resisting full possession. Virtue therefore presents Jamaican identity as something living, changing, and impossible to reduce to a fixed image.

Memory and observation

The poems differ in how the speaker reaches the landscape.

Brathwaite's speaker begins in memory: "But today I recapture the islands." The verb "recapture" suggests active recovery, as though the speaker must reclaim what distance and

history have taken from him. The landscape is emotionally intense because it is absent, remembered, and desired.

Virtue's poem is more immediate. The speaker watches an artist engage with the landscape in the present. Instead of longing for return, the poem focuses on the act of looking closely. The landscape is not lost, but it is still difficult to hold because nature keeps changing beyond the painter's control.

The sea and the hills

Both poets use natural imagery to shape meaning.

In *South*, the sea represents origin, belonging, and renewal. The speaker insists that those "born of the ocean" cannot find true solace in rivers. Rivers may move, but the ocean is home. The return to waves, shells, fishermen, and gulls restores a sense of connection.

In *Landscape Painter, Jamaica*, the hills and landscape represent beauty that resists artistic capture. The painter can admire and attempt to record the scene, but nature remains larger than the artwork. This gives the poem a playful humility: art celebrates the landscape, but cannot fully own it.

Tone and mood

Both poems are admiring, but their emotional registers differ.

South moves from nostalgia and alienation toward renewal. The northern world is cold, "saltless," and oppressive, while the remembered Caribbean is bright, salty, and alive. The tone is reflective, conflicted, and finally hopeful.

Landscape Painter, Jamaica is calmer and more playful. Its admiration is not rooted in exile or pain, but in wonder. The tone is affectionate and lightly ironic, especially in the idea that the landscape itself may frustrate the painter's attempt to capture it.

Art, memory, and possession

Both poems ask whether a place can be fully possessed.

Brathwaite's speaker tries to possess the homeland through memory, but the poem suggests that belonging is not simple ownership. He must move through longing, regret, and reconciliation before the sea can refresh him. The homeland is emotionally his, but not easily recovered.

Virtue's painter tries to possess the landscape through art, yet the landscape remains alive beyond the painting. The poem celebrates artistic effort while also showing its limits. Both poems therefore suggest that Caribbean landscape is powerful because it exceeds complete control.

Conclusion

Both *South* and *Landscape Painter, Jamaica* present Caribbean landscape as central to identity, belonging, and cultural pride. Brathwaite emphasizes displacement and return, showing the sea as the source of the speaker's self. Virtue emphasizes observation and art, showing the Jamaican landscape as living beauty that cannot be fully captured. Together, the poems suggest that place shapes identity most deeply when it is loved, remembered, and respected as something alive.