

“The ugliness of my surroundings” Tip Marugg’s Ecogothic Poetics of Isolation

Daniel Arbino

University of Texas, Austin

Abstract

In this paper I argue that Curaçaoan author Tip Marugg’s use of ecogothic articulates a postcolonial sense of insular alienation for his white protagonists in *Weekend Pilgrimage* (1957) and *The Roar of Morning* (1988). His depiction of the Dutch Caribbean environment as decadent and hostile facilitates an atmosphere in which his characters become untethered from the structures that empowered them. Marugg’s narrative techniques regarding the gothic rely on postcolonial critiques of the island of Curaçao’s racial hierarchy, the oil industry as a product of sustained colonization for the sake of globalization, and tourism as a product of neocolonialism. The environment’s opposition abounds through images of haunting winds, suicidal birds, sea monsters, and widespread destruction that serve to criticise societal changes that isolate the protagonists. Because I suggest that Marugg’s ecocriticism is implicated within a larger question of belonging as it pertains to race and class in Curaçao, I will conclude by considering how his contemporary Frank Martinus Arion employs nature in *Double Play* (1998). That is to say, whereas Marugg’s white protagonists are often the target of the island’s ecosystem, Arion’s interaction with the natural environment espouses a sentiment of belonging for his Afro-Curaçaoan protagonist that ultimately positions Afro-Curaçaoans as stewards of the island’s future.

Keywords: Ecogothic, Ecocriticism, postcolonialism, Dutch Caribbean literature

“The ugliness of my surroundings”: Tip Marugg’s Ecoготhic Poetics of Isolation

The ecogothic produces fear and aversion, disgust and horror through nature’s creatures (rats, crows, sharks), actions (thunderstorms, wind) and landscapes (dark woods, foggy bogs, rough seas). According to Smith and Hughes (2013), ecogothic is when nature “appears to participate in a language of estrangement rather than belonging” (p. 2). The term “participate” is key in this definition since nature takes on an active role in alienating characters. At the same time, feelings of unbelonging, dislocation, and estrangement are pivotal to postcolonial studies, creating a significant intersection in which ecogothic criticism is helpful to interrogate postcolonial narratives. Indeed, postcolonial societies are prime candidates for the types of dystopian ecological narratives found in ecogothic because of their exposure to the destructive environmental practices of colonialism. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) identify ecological imperialism as a prominent component of postcolonial societies, citing that it “describes the ways in which the environments of colonized societies have been physically transformed by the experience of colonial occupation” (p. 69). Moreover, “imperialism not only altered the cultural, political and social structures of colonized societies, but also devastated colonial ecologies and traditional subsistence patterns” (p. 69). These practices have continued in both neocolonial and globalized relationships through tourism and multinational corporations. In this article, I argue that Curaçaoan author Tip Marugg’s use of ecogothic articulates a postcolonial sense of isolation for his white protagonists in Curaçao, a Dutch Caribbean island that became an autonomous nation within the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2010. His depiction of the insular environment as decadent and hostile facilitates an atmosphere in which his characters become increasingly untethered from the structures that once empowered them. In turn, this dislocation leaves them with the recognition that their race confines them within history’s legacies. That is to say, the protagonists (whether intentionally or not) often act upon outdated colonial models founded on race and gender only to find that they are now alienated from the societal transitions that shift away from these very models. Marugg’s narrative techniques regarding the gothic rely on postcolonial critiques of the island’s racial hierarchy, the oil industry as a product of sustained colonization for the sake of globalization, and tourism as a product of neocolonialism. The environment’s opposition abounds through images of haunting winds, suicidal birds, sea monsters, and widespread destruction that serve to criticise societal changes that isolated the protagonists. Because I suggest that Marugg’s ecocriticism is implicated within a larger question of belonging as it pertains to race and class in Curaçao, I will conclude by considering how his contemporary Frank Martinus Arion employs nature in *Double Play*. That is to say, whereas Marugg’s white protagonists

are often the target of the island's ecosystem, Arion's interaction with the natural environment espouses a sentiment of belonging for his Afro-Curaçaoan protagonist.

While Marugg's works are often considered as a particular blend of Antillean magical realism mixed with existential ponderings, I find it beneficial for analysis to think of Marugg's writing within a gothic structure. Throughout his career, he employs gothic tropes and concepts as laid out by Hughes (2018). Take, for example, the isolato characters that Marugg utilizes as his protagonists in *Weekend Pilgrimage* (1957), *De straten van Tepalka* [The Streets of Tepalka] (1967), and *The Roar of Morning* (1988).¹ These white creole protagonists feel apart from a predominantly Afro-Curaçaoan population. This tension is often furthered by the fact that the isolatos are children of the outmoded plantocracy, but have attempted (with varying degrees of success) to distance themselves from Dutch imperialists. A postplantation gothic aesthetic develops in which these characters confront the decadent inheritance of their ancestors, whether in the form of the physical ruin of the plantation or the moral degeneration of Protestant whites who are nostalgic for their past prominence. Such is the case in the aforementioned novel *Weekend Pilgrimage*. Other key concepts of the gothic appear in his works as well: apocalyptic visions in *The Roar of Morning*; rape and miscegenation in *Weekend Pilgrimage*. Marugg's characters, against claustrophobic landscapes, "go native" in *Weekend Pilgrimage* and *The Roar of Morning*. His works also interact with less distinctive gothic tropes: anthropomorphism paired with the esoteric incorporation of Afro-Caribbean religions lends a dark and "magical" tilt in *The Roar of Morning*; *flâneurie* and psychogeography in *Weekend Pilgrimage*; and revelatory dream sequences in *De straten van Tepalka*. My intention here is to situate Marugg within a framework of the postcolonial Caribbean gothic in order to better understand how he dialogues with authors across a postplantation region whose works are also haunted by the legacies of the plantation. While scholars are quick to point to postplantation authors like Mayra Montero, William Faulkner, Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, and René Depestre as emblematic of a gothic poetics of the region, they overlook Dutch Caribbean contributions to the genre.² One of my aims in this article is to rectify that omission by pointing out Curaçao's long-standing engagement with the gothic so that new readings can emerge from the region.

¹ Because I am interested in how Marugg's ecogothic techniques engage with Curaçao and *De straten van Tepalka* is set predominantly in South America, my analysis will focus on his first and third novels. Additionally, for the sake of scope, I will refrain from discussing Marugg's poetry *Afschuw van licht: Gedichten, 1946-1951* [Horror of Light: Poems, 1946-1951] (1976) and the erotic-term dictionary *Un prinsipio pa un dikshonario erótiko papiamentu* [A Beginning for a Dictionary of Erotic Papiamentu Terms] (1992).

² See Oloff (2016), Hinrichsen (2015), Gelder (2014), Shockley (2006), Paravisini-Gebert (2002), respectively.

Numerous scholars have analysed the aforementioned traits in relation to Tip Marugg. De Roo (2001) and Rutgers (1998) both focus on the characters' apartness due to race. Meanwhile, Broek (2007) notes Marugg's fascination with creolization and miscegenation (p. 10), while van Putte-de Windt (1998) comments on the dark and surrealist tone that Marugg takes in his poetry (p. 655). Only Abraham (1991) engages meaningfully with Marugg's use of the environment (specifically animals) at the centre of her enquiries and she concludes, "the increasing attention in the work of Marugg for animals is directly related to despair over humanity. Whoever is desperate about human existence can sometimes find comfort and hope in nature" (p. 356, my translation). Building on her argument, I analyse how nature can participate in and even propel that despair over humanity, specifically as it is tied to race and class. There are multiple reasons to expand on Marugg's treatment of the environment. There is a need to better incorporate ecogothic analyses into Caribbean literatures because the region has experienced repeated environmental exploitation since 1492 which has formed the foundation for dystopic and culturally apocalyptic narratives. This exploitation began with large-scale plantations and an unquenchable thirst for lumber. It has continued into the twenty-first century with undetonated bombs from over sixty years of U.S. military practice that lie off the coast of Vieques and large cruise ships that can generate up to 11 million gallons of waste (untreated chemicals, oil, and solid waste) per day (Das, 2012, para. 2). What is more, worldwide climate change poses an incredible risk to islands due to the possibility of rising ocean levels, leading a number of islands to adopt the "1.5 to Stay Alive" platform put forth by the Paris Agreement to ensure that the planetary average temperature does not increase 1.5 degrees. In that sense, the ecogothic in the Caribbean is relevant since it engenders the reality of the Anthropocene: rising temperatures, increased hurricane activity, and rising water levels. Marugg's application of gothic techniques anticipates these growing concerns as he considers (neo)colonial implications on the environment.

Wicked Winds and Lonely Landscapes: Gender and Racial Hierarchies

Marugg's *Weekend Pilgrimage* tells the story of a white Protestant Curaçaoan who spends an inebriated evening barhopping and reflecting on his past as he contemplates moving to Canada, committing suicide, or continuing to live as an outsider on his native island. Two of his flashbacks are of particular interest because of the role that nature, particularly wind, plays to alienate him from the island. Also notable is the role that the plantation plays in both occurrences. For the narrator, the representation of the plantation is clear: he grew up in a big house where Afro-Curaçaoans comprised the workforce. The description of the house, in a "tumble down condition" (Marugg, 1957, p. 77), is no doubt an example of what Punter (2000) refers to as a History House, or a collection of gothic

images that represent a decadent colonial order: a house in ruins that the ghosts of rape, incest, miscegenation, and violence inhabit (p. 77). Shaped by his race and class, the narrator bemoans the plantation's waning power. Recounting fond memories of his childhood there, describing it as a "self-sufficient microcosm" (Marugg, 1957, p. 45) and the "heartbeat of the island" (Marugg, 1957, p. 46) prior to industrialization, it is evident that the protagonist holds the plantation in some esteem. Yet curiously, in an inverted take on white male/black female relationships in this type of domestic gothic setting, Ia, the Afro-Curaçaoan cook, drunkenly sneaks into the narrator's bedroom and rapes him.

During the narrator's retelling of the rape scene, a threatening wind invades the house like a perpetrator: "it's the same wind...which then climbed up the white wall and opened an attic window and slipped into the house like a thief and slammed the window shut behind him" (Marugg, 1957, p. 80). Here the air is invasive, and coupled with the darkness of night, transforms the big house from a site of comfort to an unfamiliar and hostile environment. The exterior force enters the private home, thereby rendering the house useless inasmuch as it does not provide shelter from predators. The wind, portrayed as masculine, positions the narrator as vulnerable as it enters his bedroom. Contemplating the moment, the narrator says, "A great terror seized you, for you realized he meant mischief. He opened the bedroom door and came in. But it was the wind no longer, it was a woman, a terrifying Negress: the wind had concealed itself in the shape of Ia..." (Marugg, 1957, pp. 80-81). While the rape is occurring, the narrator describes Ia's face not as her face, but rather as a transfigured, "distorted mask" (Marugg, 1957, p. 81). The wind takes over Ia's body like a possession, and reveals its villainous face through her. In having the wind be the masculine perpetrator, Marugg sidesteps the gendered and racialized component of the relationship between Ia and the narrator so that she is not the antagonist; nature is. Nature betrays him in additional ways during this episode: the protective cactus that reminds the narrator of a candlestick during the day (protection through light), becomes his enemy after dark "because it was not there and left you to your fate in a big bed in a big room in a big white house...." (Marugg, 1957, p. 140). The flashback portrays a series of letdowns for the narrator as the protective nature he depends on ultimately turns violent. Nature's hostility in this passage serves to isolate the narrator (who his boyhood classmates call "the European") from his home and, by extension, the island. Moreover, it reduces his racialized power over Ia, if only for one night, further untethering him from a sense of belonging. In other words, without his privileged gender and race with which to lord over others (slaves, women, nature), what remains to reaffirm his power?

The ecogothic elements of this scene between Ia and the narrator foreshadow a later event between him and a female Afro-Curaçaoan friend named Altagracia. The flashback begins with the protagonist driving her to a deserted beach in the country. The journey requires that the two must drive through a plantation. The scene is notable for what the plantation represents to each character. Keeping the narrator's nostalgia in mind, let us turn to Altagracia. She never articulates her thoughts on traveling through a plantation; however, it certainly represents a traumatic site where women of colour were doubly marginalised. As Russ (2009) remarks, the plantation is "not primarily physical but an insidious ideological and psychological trope through which intersecting histories of the New World are told and retold" (p. 3). Though Altagracia was never a slave because emancipation occurred in 1863, she most likely had a recent ancestor (perhaps a grandparent) who was. To that end, bringing her to a plantation already marks a power construct between her and the narrator in which Altagracia is haunted by a cultural anxiety resulting from the legacy of the plantation.

The wind plays an ominous role in the narrator's sojourn with Altagracia. The pair go past the plantation entrance to a bay, going deeper into a savage landscape through a road in an "abominable state" (Marugg, 1957, p. 163). There, the narrator convinces Altagracia to walk along the coastline with him and, against her will, to enter a cave to rest. The foray into the cave can be thought of as the narrator's attempt to experience the sublime, that which, as Edmund Burke declares, "excite[s] the ideas of pain and terror" (1856, p. 51). The scene is laden with negative environmental imagery, from swarming sea urchins that force Altagracia to walk in the narrator's footsteps (Marugg, 1957, p.164) to unexpected breakers that terrify Altagracia. Even the boulders are shaped like the mushroom clouds of an atom bomb explosion (Marugg, 1957, p. 163). Nature is menacing in this memory, always on the verge of attacking Altagracia, and yet the two friends ignore the signs and continue. The threats finally culminate deep inside the cave when large waves begin to fill it with water. It is in the dry darkness in a back chamber that the narrator rapes Altagracia, employing a similar language to his encounter with Ia, and therefore, worth quoting at length:

I hadn't wanted it to happen, but at that moment I was a madman, a brute, who seized with rough hands what was lying defenceless beside him in a dark cave, huddled flat against the ground, helpless and half suffocated in the scanty air hanging deep in the belly of the earth. I hadn't wanted it to happen, but it was the fault of the cold water that now and then came up to my toes and swiftly receded again; it was the sounds of the wind outside the cave, which filtered through to me in a strange, uncomprehended language, like the ominous prelude to an uncouth tom-

tom dance with its suggestive rhythm; wind sounds which slipped into the cave and took palpable shape – the long, sharp spines of the black sea urchins, the eight slimy tentacles of the octopus that clamped on to me with their suckers. It was the dread of drowning I had endured, and the ugliness of my surroundings; the feeling of being wholly withdrawn from the eyes of the world... (Marugg, 1957, p. 170).

At first glance, nature appears to be in concert with the narrator. After all, he did bring Altagracia to a deserted beach and kisses her on various occasions. Intentionally or not, the narrator exploits the aforementioned hierarchies that a trip through a plantation would connote. Based on his previous experience with Ia, one could argue that this is his attempt to reassert his authority, albeit many years later and with a different woman. The description seems to imply a distinctive occurrence however.³ The idea of suddenly turning into “a madman” and “a brute” is reminiscent of other gothic doubles such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Yet rather than an ill-boding potion that exposes the evil within a person, as in Stevenson’s titular protagonist, nature’s wildness shapes the conduct of Marugg’s protagonist. As with Ia, the wind possesses him while the idea of a suggestive rhythm from an African-based dance seemingly puts him in a trance-like state. And by invoking ‘possession’, the author once again removes culpability from the aggressor (first Ia, now the narrator) and places it on a sinister and desolate nature that manifests itself in the cave through sea urchins and octopuses, sea creatures portrayed negatively here through their dangerous spines and tentacles. The unsettling ecogothic elements evince that the island is haunted by its history and the fact that the narrator knows that he can never marry Altagracia because she is black (Marugg, 1957, p. 167) is indicative that these constructs are still in place. Perhaps knowing this, he later contemplates caves as a womb for “new dreams” (Marugg, 1957, p. 141), but his actions, such as bringing Altagracia to “a deserted beach where no one can see us” (Marugg, 1957, p. 167) rather than through the busy thoroughfare of Willemstad for all to see, reveal that these dreams do not materialize. Furthermore, that the narrator adheres to the constructs, while at the same time feeling remorse over assaulting her, suggests that he is in a unique and therefore isolated metaphorical space on the island: he is unwilling to break with societal norms, but regretful for taking advantage of them. In other words, the narrator cannot escape the brutal tension of moving forward while still trying to reconcile the past. The environment conveys this tension through marked sites, such as the antiquated big house or the isolated beach.

³ I would like to state that I am not justifying the narrator’s actions in any way.

Suicidal Birds and Steel Octopuses: Neocolonial Concerns

In *The Roar of Morning*, the narrator drunkenly sits alone at his secluded house with his dogs while recounting various episodes of his life. Nature runs amok throughout the novel, beginning with anthropomorphic birds that posit the narrator's own societal separation and culminating in an apocalypse that swallows up South America and the Caribbean. With few human characters, the novel centres on birds as gothic omens of a world on the brink of collapse. The narrator mentions that, on four occasions, he has made a trek to watch birds commit suicide by flying into a mountain:

Birds die in the blue of morning. I've never heard anyone talk about it, or read anything about it, so I assume I'm the only one who knows about a phenomenon that takes place at every sunrise on the southern slopes of the Great Mountain, when birds dive deliberately to their deaths against a sheer cliff face. (Marugg, 1988, p. 15)

The macabre instance describes nature as unbalanced. Juxtaposed with the beauty of a new day, birds commit suicide, thus suggesting that their self-destruction is unnatural. They ironically "epitomise nature" for the narrator (p. 16) and, indeed, birds are typically symbols of liberty because their ability to fly corresponds to a sense of being unencumbered. However, freedom is not portrayed in the way that the reader anticipates. Marugg employs the birds here as a part of a larger whole: natural order is in need of restoration in the Anthropocene and these birds foreshadow impending doom. Nature informs the narrator of the need for widespread change. Marugg returns to the notion multiple times in his novels. As a child in *Weekend Pilgrimage*, the narrator thinks of rain as "God washing the world clean" (Marugg, 1957, p. 18), but later questions what it means that "*this* bloody shower never stops" (Marugg, 1957, p. 19). In the context of the birds, their choice to commit suicide because they can no longer procreate is reflective of the narrator's own demise through pathetic fallacy. Industrialization and decolonization are spearheading social transformations around him that leave him further alienated. Like the birds, he finds that he no longer serves a purpose and opts for suicide. Multiple factors participate in the narrator's disenchantment with the world around him, and nature participates in conveying many of them through eerie imagery. Indeed, the narrator is preoccupied with the thought that the suicidal birds will become a tourist spectacle:

It would be best not to tell anyone about this morning ritual of the birds. If it ever becomes widely known, people will come from far and wide to watch. The travel agents in town will advertise in the press...The island authorities would apply for European development funding and use the money to convert the dilapidated private house on the other side of the

mountain into a luxury restaurant with an exotic menu. The plateau next to me would be cleared of trees and undergrowth so that open pavilions thatched with palm leaves could be built for tourists to spend the night in. (Marugg, 1988, p. 28)

The passage aligns with much of Marugg's overall resistance to foreign influence in Curaçao. The narrator expresses concern over altering the natural landscape in order to meet the neocolonial demands of tourists, effectively abdicating the island's ecosystem to entertain Western tourists. Moreover, it creates a societal expectation in which Curaçaoans then cater to the tourists through service industries (lodging, restaurant, and travel). The commodification of the suicide birds would also put Curaçao into a relationship, most likely an unequal one, with Europe and European banks. The novelty of the birds' deaths represent the loss of the island as Marugg envisions it.

Marugg returns to birds to criticize the Royal Dutch Shell oil refinery on the island.⁴ Beginning in 1918, citing political stability and geographic positioning, Royal Dutch Shell set up an oil refinery in Curaçao on the site of an old plantation. The transition from agriculture to industrialization was underway and happened within a fifty-year period. Growth was quick, resulting in increased wealth, employment opportunities, and large-scale circum-Caribbean migration on the island that affected autochthonous industries and culture. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the refinery sustained over 10,000 people (Grainger, 2012, para.12) and was a boon to the Curaçaoan economy. At the same time, it served as a reminder of a European presence wreaking havoc on a colonized ecosystem to support an industrialized world system. In *Weekend Pilgrimage*, Marugg moves from a violent ecosystem to an equally malevolent industry when he describes the refinery as "a voracious monster" that "has swallowed up agriculture, salt manufacture, stock-breeding, Panama-hat weaving all the other home industries" (1957, p. 186). The consumption of insular industries (small-scale, autonomous, and locally run) creates a reliance on foreign industry such as oil and tourism that are replete with eco-destruction. For instance, the narrator finds a consequence of the oil industry in a "large, grubby-white bird [that] fluttered along and perched on the deck rail. Its belly and feet were covered in oil" (Marugg, 1988, p. 85). Between the two novels, the reader has a clear comparison of the refinery to an all-consuming and insatiable beast with tentacles that lays waste to the island and the victim (the bird, local industry). The reference to an oil spill (the bird covered in oil) suggests that the sacrifice for rampant industrialization is a healthy ecosystem; indeed, the monster (the refinery) is the progeny of an unequal relationship in which

⁴ Ironically, Marugg worked for more than twenty years in public relations at Royal Dutch Shell.

technology persistently drains the environment of its resource. Marugg uses this as an opportunity to criticise the priorities of the insular society that privileges multinational corporations and tourism with little regard to its own people and environment. Ultimately, the island's mechanization and industry serve the same purpose: both remind the protagonist of how detached he is. Society has left him behind through its industrialization and globalization, yet he does not lament it because he views both as monstrous and abominable. Alternatively, nature only proposes a path to death.

A Revolt and an Apocalypse: *Tabula Rasa*

Weekend Pilgrimage and *The Roar of Morning* may have similar protagonists, but their endings are distinct. In the former, the protagonist starts anew after he chooses to remain in Curaçao, a place that he describes as "my town...my island" (Marugg, 1957, p. 182). I juxtapose it with the ending of *The Roar of Morning*, a novel originally titled *The Destruction of South America* (Vincent, 2015, p. 128). As the original title suggests, Marugg's outlook became increasingly pessimistic during the thirty-one years that passed between these two publications. Authoritarian regimes and subsequent protests were present throughout South America and the Caribbean. In Curaçao, the once-booming economy came to a halt in the late 1960s, leading to the historic *Trinta di Mei* [Thirtieth of May] protest of 1969. Briefly, this significant event sparked an era of change that encouraged political participation and representation for Afro-Curaçaoans in a colonial government that had universal suffrage, but favoured the white elite class through appointments. The protest began over a labour dispute between Shell and predominantly Afro-Curaçaoan employees when mechanization caused the dismissal of many workers (Eckkrammer, 2007, p. 77). It eventually took on racial overtones in response to the economic decline that affected Shell workers, but not the upper echelons of society that Dutch nationals and white elites populated (Oostindie, 2014, p. 250). What began as a conflict over wages and work eventually developed into a mass revolt of 3,000-4,000 people against exploitation by multinational corporations (Clemencia, 2001, p. 439). The protagonist's reaction to the event suggests a disillusionment characterized by a sense of dislocation from the mobilizing (and predominantly Afro-Curaçaoan) masses. After his Afro-Curaçaoan lover recommends that he spend the night with her to protect his "pale Protestant mug" from a lynching (Marugg, 1988, p. 58), the protagonist remembers the moment as "this day when so much changed, when my sleepy native isle was rudely deflowered by revolt, pain and blood..." (Marugg, 1988, p. 58). Because the protagonist personifies the island as a raped body, the racial undertones infer that the protesters, of which the majority are Afro-Curaçaoan, are the violators and harbingers of violence. The imagery around this event pits the narrator in opposition to the motives and aftermath of

the movement. Because the movement goes on to spark widespread change, the island becomes unfamiliar to the protagonist, creating an uncanny discomfort for him that ultimately plays out by his living a hermit lifestyle in a sparsely populated part of the island.

The narrator's negative reaction to *Trinta di Mei* inspires the cataclysmic conclusion of *The Roar of Morning*. Munro (2015) declares that "the apocalyptic narrative is generated as it were from the inside, as a means of understanding (and surviving) the particular movements of history that have created the disasters of the present" (p. 2). For the white Protestant protagonist, the *Trinta di Mei* movement initiates change, but one that he cannot understand or control, so that he rejects this transformation in favour of an even larger change. As night becomes morning, the protagonist describes minute-by-minute an apocalypse that destroys South America before heading to the Caribbean. Through several pages, he welcomes an angry ecosystem that includes a murderous sun (Marugg, 1988, p. 121), vultures that "dive down at lightning speed and plunge their bald heads ravenously into swollen human and animal carcasses" (p. 120), and a growing swarm of *Erebus odora*, the black witch moth, that the narrator identifies as a premonition of death. Rarely seen in pairs, these moths create an ominous scene in which a "sea of hundreds...is washing incessantly and almost silently over the garden" (p. 90). These predatory elements of nature put the environment in control and humanity at its mercy. In line with Hughes (2018) who claims that "ecological disaster is...the catalyst for social change" (p. 25), I argue that Marugg's apocalypse gives the island a chance to regenerate without having to reconcile 500 years of colonialism that accounted for the genocide of First Peoples, enslavement of Africans and their descendants, imposition of European religions, and the subsequent race and class struggles that continue to govern Curaçaoan society. To think of "apocalypse" as an end is to overlook its Greek etymology as a revelation, which I interpret as a revelation of something yet to come. Lansu (1991) concurs that "in the apocalypse, after all, lies the only way out, both for the narrator and for the world in which he lives" and that it paves "the way for a virgin start, enabling the birth of a new purity" (p. 350, my translation). The narrator acknowledges that the island (and indeed the continent) needs to start anew. That is to say, a post-*Trinta di Mei* society cannot begin to decolonize as long as a small, elite group control the land and people. In fact, the narrator ponders this need for upheaval when watching the suicide birds:

In the hidden blackness of the *selvas* and on the pale, dune-coloured beaches, thousands of vague phantoms, the damned from five hundred years of Latin American history, emerge from their shadowy realm to torment the human beings of today, robbing them of their guns and jewels...Centuries-old trees, their branches malevolently twisted as if they wished to strangle all those who have been silently sinning for so

long, wear a satanic leer in their weathered crowns – the grimace of pain and impotence that cannot be erased because it is the suffering and helplessness of our ancestors. We are destined to feel its consequences to our dying day, when we pass on the burden to our firstborn son. Today's suffering is caused by what happened yesterday (Marugg, 1988, pp. 25-6).

The hostile wilderness described above, replete with the spectral reminders of the brutality of colonialism, is indicative of the narrator's awareness that change is paramount. Otherwise, a pattern of robbing and torment continues since the mere mention of "guns" alludes to violence, whether under the guise of maintaining peace or inciting revolt. Marugg uses chiaroscuro to contrast the landscapes of jungle and beach, and yet both are home to atrocities specific to the Americas, a hemisphere that carries the trauma of displacing multiple peoples and, according to the protagonist, can only be reset with sweeping annihilation.⁵ This annihilation gives agency to nature, and malevolent trees that are "satanic" suddenly have the catastrophic ability to avenge the barbarity that they have witnessed in humankind over centuries. Destruction breaks these cycles. Marugg's character commits suicide because he has inherited the tragedies of his ancestors and suffers from this very trauma; he is the son. Furthermore, his depiction of change is in such a negative light (satanic to signify evil) that it implies his unwillingness to participate in the aftermath. To be sure, suicide does not liberate him from the confines of history, but at the same time, his suicide alongside the apocalypse *can* yield a large-scale *tabula rasa*.

Conclusion: The Reforestation of an Island

Marugg's cataclysm at the end of *The Roar of Morning* is all-encompassing and destroys a region that he describes as plagued by colonialism, oppressive military regimes, environmental damage, and racial and social inequality. It comes with the understanding that his social class and race are no longer controlling the island. Nature's destruction parallels his feelings of hopelessness and displacement. In *Weekend Pilgrimage*, this displacement begins early when Portuguese and Dutch workers deforest a pre-colonial rainforest. For Marugg, this irrevocable loss that he describes as when "the island was no longer an island" (Marugg, 1957, p. 154), hews closely to what Spivak (1985) termed "worlding." Specifically, Curaçao's ecological devastation for the sake of Western notions

⁵ For the purpose of this paper, I am concerned with the specificities of the Americas, but this is not to deny the colonial and postcolonial atrocities of other places, especially in the tropics, and their ecological and gothic interpretations. See, for instance, Spicer (2016) and Daly (2018).

of “progress” marks the island’s entrance as a colonized space into a Eurocentric world system. Notably, the narrator calls attention to hundreds of windmills that deplete the island’s ground water, oil spills that contaminate the harbour, and (vague) trucks that purposely desand beaches (Marugg, 1957, p. 154). The environmental destruction launched during the colonial period, like that of the neoliberal and neocolonial moments discussed above, underscores an island headed towards ruin. In fact, Marugg collapses time between the early colonial period and the current exploitative moments that he touches on in reference to tourism and the oil refinery to assert the ecological violence that has happened across time and space – colonial, neocolonial and globalizing – precisely to argue for its all-encompassing end.⁶ For Marugg, an apocalypse is the only way to undo that violence. Importantly, this line of thinking affects more than just the declining elites. That is to say, the timing of the apocalypse within two decades of *Trinta di Mei* also prevents Afro-Curaçaoans from attaining longstanding power.

In contrast, Frank Martinus Arion’s *Double Play* (1972), written just three years after the events of *Trinta di Mei*, positions Afro-Curaçaoans as stewards for the insular environment. Whereas monstrous nature abounds in Marugg’s texts, his contemporary Arion is able to utilize nature to express optimism for Afro-Curaçaoans who have used a post-*Trinta di Mei* era to enter different societal sectors. *Double Play* tells the story of four friends involved in an enduring match of dominos. One of the players, Janchi Pau, returns to Curaçao after working as a seaman. Now home and working for Shell, he plans to contribute to the betterment of the island through a furniture collective. His medium is wood, thereby creating a relationship between him and nature in which he plants new trees to replace the ones he uses. This relationship is different from the Dutch colonists who exploited nature, as Janchi Pau is quick to clarify:

It was ironic perhaps, he thought, that if ever the Solema Furniture Factory became a flourishing business, he would need more than anything on this island, wabis.... This despised tree, which is found everywhere on the island, and is second only to the cactus in numbers, would therefore be the starting point of his business.... And he thought that he really ought to start planting them.... He would have to plant them here in any case. He wouldn’t work as Solema had told him the Dutch had done in the past: they felled all the Brazil wood that they needed, and which was found in abundance on the island when they arrived here in the seventeenth century, without it occurring to them that they could also

⁶ Byrne (2017) presents this idea of collapsing time in reference to her analysis of Hanya Yanagihara, I also find the idea apt to discuss Marugg.

plant young trees, so that afterwards there would be Brazil wood for them and for everyone else! Always. But no, they'd quickly deforested the whole, beautiful island and in so doing had driven the rain away, perhaps for good, then went on to complain that it was so 'arid' and 'dry'. They're apes, those Dutch, he thought. Barbarians. Underdeveloped. Savages. (Arion, 1972, pp. 335-6).

For Janchi Pau, nature and people function in a working partnership that is conducive to the island's growth. The furniture collective utilizes the wabi tree, a symbol for the Afro-Curaçaoan masses that have withstood colonial practices, to sell products that provide them with a source of income. Then, presumably, the artisans spend that money in the local community. To ensure the operation's longevity they also plant new trees, which in turn, helps to sustain the island's ecology. This very notion is decolonial in spirit when compared to the exploitative measures taken by European colonizers, and aligns with the decolonizing approaches occurring in Curaçao at the time of publication. To reforest the island is the very opposite of Marugg's destruction; it is a slow process of investing in nature's enduring development. Indeed, while the protagonist in *Weekend Pilgrimage* aligns the chopping down of the tree with the traumatic loss of the island as an island, Janchi Pau uses a similar instance to motivate him to reclaim the island; it is not a lost cause in need of a *tabula rasa*. This suggests that the ecogothic elements of Marugg's texts are linked inextricably to race and the loss of a historically white Protestant power hierarchy.

The ecogothic poetics in Marugg's works are an environmental manifestation bonded to one racial group's decline. Ecogothic elements play a pivotal role in identifying past systems of oppression that continue to have not only an unsettling presence, but also a material reality, in terms of continuing neocolonial exploitation of the Caribbean. The environment in *Weekend Pilgrimage* informs the narrator that certain colonial modes are outdated through hostile winds and sea monsters, though ultimately the narrator reconciles his increasing anxieties about not belonging when a mesquite tree tells him that his affinity for Afro-Curaçaoan cultures anchors him to the island (Marugg, 1957, p. 182). In *The Roar of Morning*, however, the environment is unforgiving and the annihilation of the region is the only way to break from these cycles of colonial violence. In both novels, the ecogothic exhibits the isolation and alienation of Marugg's white narrators, and serves as a reminder of the ongoing decolonial shift that gains momentum with the *Trinta di Mei* movement and finds literary footing in Arion's *Double Play*.

References

- Abraham, E. (1991). Tip Marugg en de dieren. In M. Coomans-Eustatia, W. Rutgers, & H. E. Coomans (Eds.), *Drie Curaçaose schrijvers in veelvoud* (pp. 351–357). Zutphen, NL: Walburg Press.
- Arion, F. M. (1998). *Double play*. (P. Vincent, Trans.). London, UK: Faber. (Original work published 1972)
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). Ecoimperialism. In *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts* (Second, pp. 79–80). London, UK: Routledge.
- Broek, A. (2007). Ideology and Writing in Papiamentu: A bird's eye view. *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 5(1), 1-20. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40986314>
- Burke, E. (1856). *A philosophical inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful*. (A. Mills, Trans.). New York, NY: Harpers & Brothers.
- Byrne, E. (2017). Ecogothic dislocations in Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in the Trees*. *Interventions*, 19(7), 962–975. doi:10.1080/1369801X.2017.1403942
- Clemencia, J. (2001). Katibu ta galina: From Hidden to Open Protest in Curaçao. In A. J. Arnold, I. Phaf-Rheinberger, & V. M. Kutzinski (Eds.), *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (Vol. 2, pp. 433–441). Amsterdam, NL: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Das, L. (2012, February 4). Cruise ship pollution in the Caribbean coast. *The Caribbean current*. Retrieved from <https://thecaribbeancurrent.com/cruise-ship-pollution-in-the-caribbean-coast/>
- Daly, S. Gothic spaces and the tropical city: Reading *The crocodile fury*, *Hunting the tiger*, *Life's mysteries*. *eTropic*, 17(2), 18-32. doi: 10.25120/etropic.17.2.2018.3653
- de Roo, J. (2001). Antillean literary criticism: Caribbean vs. Dutch perspectives. In I. Phaf-Rheinberger (Ed.), *A history of literature in the Caribbean* (Vol. 2, pp. 645–650). Amsterdam, NL: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Eckkrammer, E. M. (2007). Papiamentu, cultural resistance, and socio-cultural challenges: The ABC islands in a nutshell. *Journal of Caribbean literatures*, 5(1), 73–93.
- Gelder, K. (2014). The postcolonial gothic. In J. E. Hogle (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the modern gothic* (pp. 191–207). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Grainger, S. (2012, March 14). Caribbean island Curaçao faces oil refinery dilemma. *BBC news*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-17290626>
- Hinrichsen, L. (2015). Writing past trauma: Faulkner and the gothic. In J. T. Matthews (Ed.), *William Faulkner in context* (pp. 219–230). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Hughes, W. (2018). *Key concepts in the gothic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lansu, A. (1991). Een pelgrimage naar het Aards paradijs. In M. Coomans-Eustatia, W. Rutgers, & H. E. Coomans (Eds.), *Drie Curaçaose schrijvers in veelvoud* (pp. 339–350). Zutphen, NL: Walburg Press.
- Marugg, T. (1960). *Weekend pilgrimage*. (R. Edwards, Trans.). London, UK: Hutchinson. (Original work published 1957).
- Marugg, T. (1967). *In de straten van Tepalka*. Amsterdam, NL: De Bezige Bij.
- Marugg, T. (1976). *Afschuw van licht: Gedichten, 1946-1951*. Rotterdam, NL: Flamboyant.

- Marugg, T. (1992). *Un prinsipio pa un dikshonario erótiko papiamentu*. Kòrsou, AN: Scherpenheuvel.
- Marugg, T. (2015). *The roar of morning*. (P. Vincent, Trans.). New Haven, CT: Yale UP. (Original work published 1988)
- Munro, M. (2015). *Tropical apocalypse: Haiti and the Caribbean end times*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Oloff, K. (2016). Zombies, gender, and world-ecology: Gothic narrative in the work of Ana Lydia Vega and Mayra Montero. In C. Campbell & M. Niblett (Eds.), *The Caribbean: Aesthetics, world-ecology, politics* (pp. 46–62). Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press.
- Oostindie, G. (2014). Black Power, Popular Revolt, and Decolonization in the Dutch Caribbean. In K. Quinn (Ed.), *Black Power in the Caribbean* (pp. 239–260). Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Paravisini-Gebert, L. (2002). Colonial and postcolonial gothic: The Caribbean. In J. E. Hogle (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to gothic fiction* (pp. 229–257). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Punter, D. (2000). *Postcolonial imaginings: Fictions of a new world order*. Lanham, MD: Rowman.
- Russ, E. C. (2009). *The Plantation in the postslavery imagination*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Rutgers, W. (1998). Dutch Caribbean literature. *Callaloo*, 21(3), 542–555. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3299612>
- Shockley, E. (2006). The horrors of homelessness: gothic doubling in Kincaid's *Lucy* and Brontë's *Villette*. In L. Lang-Peralta (Ed.), *Jamaica Kincaid and Caribbean double crossings* (pp. 45–62). Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press.
- Smith, A., & Hughes, W. (2013). Introduction: Defining the ecogothic. In A. Smith & W. Hughes (Eds.), *Ecogothic* (pp. 1–14). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Spicer, C. (2016). "The cyclone which is at the heart of things": The cyclone as trope of place and apocalypse in Queensland literature. *eTropic*, 15(2), 58-68. doi: [10.25120/etropic.15.2.2016.3542](https://doi.org/10.25120/etropic.15.2.2016.3542).
- Spivak, G. C. (1985). Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), 235–261.
- Stevenson, R.L. (1886). *Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. London, UK: Longmans, Green.
- Van Putte-de Windt, I. (1998). Caribbean poetry in Papiamentu. *Callaloo*, 21(3), 654-659. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3299646>
- Vincent, P. (2015). Afterword. In T. Marugg, P. Vincent (Trans.), *The roar of morning* (pp. 123–129). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.