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1 essays

*What and When
was Caribbean Modernism?*

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Wigbertson Julian Isenia

Language, Identity, and
Transgender Narratives
in Dutch Caribbean
Modernism

WIGBERTSON JULIAN ISENIA is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, focusing on gender, sexuality, and postcolonial contexts, particularly in the Dutch Caribbean. He has published in journals such as *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* (Dutch Journal for Gender Studies), *Feminist Review*, and *Small Axe*, and contributed to the *Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*. His monograph, *The Question of Dutch Politics as a Matter of Theater*, was published in 2017. His article “Looking for Kambrada: Sexuality and Social Anxieties in the Dutch Colonial Archive, 1882–1923” received an honorable mention for the Gregory Sprague Prize from the Committee on LGBT History. His dissertation, “Queer Sovereignities: Cultural Practices of Sexual Citizenship in the Dutch Caribbean,” also received an honorable mention from the Caribbean Studies Association. Beyond academia, he co-curated the exhibitions “Nos tei” about queer of color organizing and “House of HIV: The Stories Behind 40 Years of Community Initiatives.”

Caribbean literature offers a rich exploration of identity, history, and language, with Caribbean modernism embodying the region's quest for self-definition in the aftermath of colonial rule. This essay investigates the contributions of the Curaçaoan writer Frank Martinus Arion to Caribbean modernism, focusing on his integration of language, culture, and transgender narratives in the Dutch Caribbean context. Arion's works, particularly his novel *De laatste vrijheid* (The last freedom, 1995), exemplify his commitment to challenging colonial legacies and reshaping postcolonial identities through his distinctive storytelling.

The guiding questions for this analysis are as follows: How do Arion's contributions to Caribbean modernism, through his exploration of linguistic legacy, societal upheaval, and the symbolic ascent in postcolonial consciousness, interplay to shape a distinct Caribbean cultural and artistic identity, particularly in the context of the Dutch Caribbean's historical and societal challenges? How did the 30 May 1969 uprising in Curaçao catalyze significant cultural, linguistic, and political transformations in the Dutch Caribbean, and how are these changes reflected in the narratives and character developments in *De laatste vrijheid*? Additionally, how does Arion's representation of a volcano as a trans* entity in the novel serve as a metaphor for the transformative and disruptive forces in postcolonial Caribbean societies, particularly in challenging and reshaping traditional narratives and identities related to gender and modernity? This essay examines Arion's engagement with these themes, examining the role of language as a conduit for cultural continuity and a reflection of existing tensions within a postcolonial framework. It explores Arion's depiction of transgender identities, setting them within the broader search for postcolonial identity and the articulation of a distinct regional voice that challenges the legacies of colonial suppression.

The structure of this essay is as follows: First, I discuss Arion's linguistic contributions and his impact on shaping postcolonial identities. I then analyze his literary portrayal of a transgender character, contextualizing this depiction within the region's modernist narrative.

Finally, I synthesize these insights to assess the broader implications of Arion's work for our understanding of the temporal and thematic scopes of Caribbean modernism. This analysis aims to demonstrate how Arion's oeuvre contributes to and enriches our understanding of Caribbean modernism by integrating transgender narratives and linguistic evolution.

Arion's work on Creole linguistics, tracing its origins and ties to Caribbean modernism, underscores the role of language in articulating resistance and identity. This essay argues that Arion's literary contributions embody the essence of Caribbean modernism and provide profound insights into the relationship between language, identity, and transgender narratives. Through his advocacy for linguistic legitimacy and his character portrayals, Arion's work serves as a pivotal platform for redefining postcolonial identity in the Dutch Caribbean.

Act I:

Linguistic Legacy and Caribbean Modernism

The 1992 television episode "De geest van de vrijheid: Frank Martinus Arion" (The spirit of freedom: Frank Martinus Arion) features a powerful scene with Arion ascending Curaçao's Sint-Christoffelberg, the island's highest peak at 372 meters. This hill, named after Saint Christopher, is the third-highest in the predominantly flat terrain of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. At the summit, viewers are treated to a panoramic view of the island, including the distant Tafelberg (Table Mountain), reminiscent of a similarly named mountain in another former Dutch colony in South Africa. In this pivotal moment, Arion stands with his back to the camera, a deliberate choice that creates a striking and enigmatic image (see figs. 1 and 2). As he reaches the peak, he raises his arms and proclaims, "Yokang a pari guene" (The Indigenous woman bore a Negro), a phrase he emphatically repeats. The dramatic breakthrough of sunlight piercing the clouds casts an ethereal glow around him, enhancing the scene's mystical aura.



Figure 1. Wigbertson Julian Isenia, *Frank Martinus Arion Ascending Sint-Cristoffelberg: Embracing Freedom at the Summit*, 2024, digital drawing using a graphics tablet, based on a scene from the 1992 TV episode “De Geest van de Vrijheid: Frank Martinus Arion,” directed by Sherman de Jesus, 48.73 × 48.72 cm (19.18 × 19.18 in.)

The episode employs a dynamic range of visual techniques to enhance the cinematic quality of this sequence. The montage includes a distant shot of Arion’s solitary figure against the expansive landscape, a low-angle view emphasizing his imposing stature, and a close-up that deepens the emotional impact of the scene. The movement of his clothing in the wind



Figure 2. Wigbertson Julian Isenia, *Frank Martinus Arion’s Proclamation: “Yokang a pari guene” at the Peak of Sint-Cristoffelberg*, 2024, digital drawing using a graphics tablet, based on a scene from the 1992 TV episode “De Geest van de Vrijheid: Frank Martinus Arion,” directed by Sherman de Jesus, 47.96 × 48.72 cm (18.88 × 19.18 in.)

adds a dynamic element to the visuals, which are accompanied by John Corigliano’s Symphony no. 1: I—Apologue: Of Rage and Remembrance, whose stirring melodies augment the tension and drama.

Arion, a distinguished poet, novelist, linguist with a PhD, language advocate, and former director of the Antillean Linguistic Institute in Curaçao, is introduced in this scene. His life (1936–2015) and legacy are captured in this 1992 production by the National Dutch Broadcasting Corporation. This profile is part of a triptych in the Sound & Vision archives, which includes two other Curaçaoan male writers: Boeli van Leeuwen and Tip Marugg.

The phrase Arion declaims in this opening scene, “Yokang a pari guene,” is from the Guene language. Guene, a language devised by enslaved people, survived as a medium of covert communication into the twentieth century but is no longer widely spoken today.¹ Arion’s scholarly work on Guene assessed its impact on the development of Papiamentu, a creole language that blends Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and Taino elements and is spoken by most of the population on Curaçao and Bonaire.² Unlike many Creole languages, which have not been formally integrated into educational systems in the regions where they are spoken, Papiamentu is an official language of instruction and initial literacy in the public school system. Additionally, it serves as the official language of government in Bonaire and Curaçao, as Papiamentu does in Aruba.³ Guene’s cryptic nature enabled enslaved people to discreetly share their experiences. Anecdotal evidence from a person born in 1905 suggests that workers in phosphate mines would sing in Guene to obscure the true meanings of their songs from overseers.⁴ Rose Mary Allen interprets this secretive use of Guene as a form of resistance, reflecting the nuanced ways the oppressed negotiate and defy power dynamics.⁵ The expression “Yokang a pari guene” encapsulates a commitment to linguistic evolution intertwined with the island’s historical narrative, highlighting language development as a tool for critiquing colonial history and achieving liberation. This phrase acknowledges the tragic displacement and genocide of the Indigenous populations, followed by the atrocities of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, which uprooted African communities. It also carries personal ancestral meaning for Arion, linking Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean heritages. In discussing this, it is imperative to recognize the phrase’s significance in the development

and relevance of creole languages, particularly as it addresses the historical erasure of Indigenous languages and cultures in the Caribbean, especially in the Dutch Caribbean island territories. Historians account for Indigenous people of the Americas in the history books of the Dutch Caribbean islands in brief descriptions, focusing mainly on the purportedly complete genocide of the Indigenous people. As a result, the Indigenous culture remains, as Stuart Hall puts it, a ghostly presence, “part of the barely knowable or usable past.”⁶

Arion’s ascent of Sint-Christoffelberg in the episode is symbolic, possibly suggesting that his physical climb mirrors the ascension of postcolonial consciousness. This essay aims to clarify the essence of Caribbean modernism, primarily addressing the “what” and, to a lesser extent, the “when” of this movement. Emerging in the early twentieth century, Caribbean literary modernism was propelled by a group of writers who blended African American cultural elements, European avant-garde, and Indigenous Caribbean traditions. This movement eschews simple imitation of established forms, opting instead for genuine and innovative expressions of artistic identity.⁷ This approach transcends mere mimicry of diverse influences; instead, it represents a dynamic process of creative revision and renewal. At the heart of Caribbean modernism is its deliberate focus on the themes of race, identity, and cultural heritage, underscoring its vital role in shaping the broader discourse on modernity. Capturing scholars’ varied perspectives in a singular, unified definition of Caribbean modernism is an unattainable goal. The concept is akin to the multidimensional nature of a church, which serves a spectrum of purposes for its attendees. Some are attracted by the solemnity of prayer, while others are drawn by the sense of community and shared cultural experiences, such as communal meals. Some seek meaningful connections that elevate their everyday lives, while others enjoy the passive experience of simply being part of the congregation, just happy to come along and participate without deeper engagement.

Interpretations of Caribbean modernism are notably diverse: some scholars view it as a platform for critical reflection and intellectual discourse, while others view it as an arena for exploring and appreciating cultural expressions. Some seek in it a sense of identity or community, while others participate more passively. This range of engagement and interpretation highlights the complexity and multidimensional nature of Caribbean modernism as both a literary and cultural movement. To me, Caribbean modernism signifies a profound engagement with the region's unique cultural history, spotlighting the narratives and experiences of marginalized communities. This movement is characterized by bold experimentation in form, language, and genre, incorporating elements such as free verse, surrealism, and Indigenous folk traditions. It is deeply entrenched in the sociopolitical context of art and literature, often addressing themes such as colonialism, racial injustice, and labor exploitation. Open to global influences, particularly from Europe and the United States, Caribbean modernism also incorporates perspectives from across the Caribbean and Latin America. Ultimately, it is committed to developing a distinctive Caribbean cultural and artistic identity that critically reflects and addresses the region's complex sociopolitical landscape.

The relationship between modernism and modernity clarifies the temporal aspect of modernism, or the "when." David Scott argues that colonial impositions of modernity interrupted the natural evolution of cultural identities, transforming the advent of modernity into a period of disruption rather than continuous progression.⁸ This disruption compelled postcolonial societies to reconstruct their identities under drastically altered conditions. Caribbean modernism is deeply entrenched in this colonial legacy, manifesting as a conscious engagement with history and a proactive journey toward the future. Scott champions a critical perspective on modernity from a postcolonial viewpoint, advocating that these societies be seen as active architects of their destiny rather than passive victims of an imposed modernity.

Building on this conceptual framework, Caribbean modernism has profoundly influenced the formation of a distinct regional and diasporic identity, presenting innovative methods for contesting colonial power and oppression. This movement has created a platform through which Caribbean individuals can articulate their political opinions, artistic expressions, and philosophical principles of self-governance. Although Arion's oeuvre is not typically classified within Caribbean modernism, applying this analytical framework to his work offers valuable insights into the themes of cultural resilience and the pursuit of autonomy in Caribbean literature.

Arion's novel *De laatste vrijheid* is set on the fictional Caribbean island of Amber (see fig. 3). The narrative begins with part 1, "Het Verkoolde Bos" (The charred forest). Based on new data and past volcanic activity, Brouce, a volcano watcher, initiates an evacuation of Constance, the island's capital. In part 2, "Guerrillas of Love," US journalist Joan arrives to report on the evacuation. She travels to Constance and meets Daryll, the protagonist, who has decided to remain behind. Accompanied by Daryll and his children, Joan climbs the volcano. During their ascent, Daryll tells Joan about his past: originally from Curaçao, he resisted Dutch influences, choosing to educate his children in Papiamentu rather than the colonial Dutch language. His wife, Adeline, seeking a music career, moved to the Netherlands, resulting in their separation, although she continued to provide financial support for their children. Daryll relocated to Amber, attracted by its history. Amber shares historical parallels with Haiti, notably due to a rebellion in 1795 when enslaved and recently freed people clashed with white French, Dutch, and English enslavers, resulting in a victory for the enslaved people. Unlike many other Caribbean nations, "Amber een van de weinige landen in het Caribisch gebied waar de slavernij afgeschaft is zonder dat de slaveneigenaren vergoeding voor hun slaven hebben gekregen."⁹



Figure 3. Wigbertson Julian Isenia, *Volcanic Eruption*, 2024, digital drawing using a graphics tablet, based on Frank Martinus Arion, *De laatste vrijheid* book cover, 158.08 × 211.67 cm (62.24 × 83.33 in.)

Despite the challenges of separating and not raising her children, Adeline dedicates herself to composing symphonies that draw on her experiences and explore themes such as sexual freedom and musical independence. In part 3, “Het ei van Dogons” (The egg of the Dogons), Joan’s relationship with Daryll deepens as she admires his family’s steadfast resilience. Overcoming her initial apprehension, Joan spends a night with Daryll, significantly strengthening their bond. In part 4, “De laatste vrijheid” (The last freedom), Joan interviews Daryll alongside four volcanic experts. During the interview, Daryll delivers a compelling speech about the choices Constance’s residents face: they either remain in restrictive refugee camps or live freely in the city under the threat of volcanic eruption. Witnessing the interview, Adeline rushes to Constance to rescue their children as the evacuation camps empty as residents choose to return home. Subsequently, the volcanic experts visit the crater with Daryll, leaving Joan to care for Daryll’s children.

The volcano erupts during the visit, killing three experts and severely injuring Daryll, who narrowly escapes with one surviving researcher. When Adeline learns that her children are safe and that the airport has been damaged, she decides to stay in the Netherlands. The dead experts are commemorated as heroes. The volcano is deemed no longer dangerous, and the evacuation order is soon revoked. On 1 September, the Creole language is officially adopted as the language of instruction in all of Amber’s schools.

This transformation of Amber from crisis to renewal echoes in the cultural sphere as well. Arion started the magazine *Ruku* in 1969. In an early issue, Cola Debrot, then the governor of the Netherlands Antilles, published a quatrain—a four-line poem—that reflected on the island’s melancholic state: “Droevig eiland, droevig volk.”¹⁰ Building on the theme of desolation expressed in Debrot’s quatrain, Arion later wrote *De laatste vrijheid*, symbolically reversing the “sad island” narrative by showcasing a transformation from despair to hope.¹¹

Throughout *De laatste vrijheid*, themes such as the tension between progress and tradition,

societal struggles, and human vulnerability are intertwined. The novel mirrors the principles of Caribbean modernism through its layered depiction of the personal and societal transformation on Amber. The narrative deftly explores the region's postcolonial quest for identity—a cornerstone of Caribbean modernism.¹² It aligns with Arion's dedication to preserving Caribbean linguistic heritage, culminating in the symbolic adoption of Creole as Amber's official language. This act of cultural affirmation and resilience is emblematic of the themes central to Caribbean modernist thought.

De laatste vrijheid does not comfortably align with the conventional timeline of Caribbean modernism, which is typically defined by scholars as beginning in the early twentieth century and extending through the Second World War and subsequent decolonization movements.¹³ Additionally, the style of Caribbean modernism is contested, as Arion's approach is notably traditional. Ronald Severing observes that Arion consistently utilizes classical structures in his writing. For instance, *De laatste vrijheid* is built around a biblical archetype, with Daryll cast as a Christ-like figure in the idyllic setting of Amber, accompanied by his disciples Sigui and Mau.¹⁴ From the slopes of a volcano, he delivers a sermon reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, which is broadcast globally on the CIN network, stirring the masses. Ultimately, he survives a volcanic eruption and emerges from a cave, mirroring Christ's resurrection.

Arion's penchant for crafting narratives around familiar classical motifs is apparent throughout his work, assuming the reader's familiarity with these archetypal stories. Although one does not need this background to understand the basic plot, possessing it deepens the reading experience by adding layers of meaning, as Severing points out.¹⁵ Severing also identifies a constellation of recurrent themes in Arion's oeuvre: a critical view of European and other dominant influences, characterized by a rejection of all forms of neocolonialism; a focus on racial tensions; a challenge to established hierarchies; and a keen engagement with Indigenous languages.¹⁶ These consistent elements anchor Arion in the Caribbean

modernist tradition, reflecting its opposition to colonial legacies and its celebration of cultural uniqueness.

Arion explicitly counters Debrot's portrayal of a "sad island, sad people" by quoting and critiquing V. S. Naipaul. Part 2 of Arion's novel, named after Naipaul's book *Guerrillas*, critiques Naipaul's infamous assertion that the history of the Caribbean cannot be satisfactorily told and that "nothing was created in the West Indies."¹⁷ Naipaul's influence is also evident in Aideline's and Daryll's travels through Caribbean countries and their perspectives on them. For example, "Alles wat kon bijdragen om Naipauls negatieve visie op het Caribisch gebied te ontzenuwen, was welkom in Grenada," and Aideline's music opposes Naipaul's books, which depict the Caribbean as an utterly hopeless corner of the world.¹⁸ Arion engages in a linguistic experiment typical of Caribbean modernism—an effort to articulate a postcolonial self in contrast, and in relation, to the former colonial powers and their portrayal of the region. Arion does this within a trans-Caribbean framework, connecting with other Caribbean thinkers such as Derek Walcott.

Indeed, as Doris Hambuch points out, Arion extensively quotes Walcott's *Omeros* in the final part of *De laatste vrijheid*, which unfolds during and after the volcanic eruption. Having read *Omeros* and been inspired by Daryll's plea for Caribbean citizens to return home, Aideline revises her musical composition, *Guerrillas of Love*. It becomes the concluding part of a more extended concert, now renamed *Thuiskomst van de guerilla* (Homecoming of the guerrilla). Aideline reflects on the contrast between Naipaul and Walcott while contemplating Walcott's writings. She notes on Walcott's writing, "Al zijn boeken waren vol van *sunrise*."¹⁹ She realizes on the plane that if Naipaul's idea—that the tropics were sad, unproductive, and imitative—held any truth, it was because Naipaul himself was one of the biggest imitators of Europeans, who typically saw only the sunset in the tropics. Unlike Naipaul, who refused to identify with the Caribbean and instead saw himself as a visitor, Walcott consistently

emphasized his Caribbean identity. As Aideline observes, Walcott's perspective celebrates the region's inherent vitality and potential: "Europeanen zien in de tropen voornamelijk de zonsondergang. . . . Ze konden zich gemakkelijk een tropische zonsondergang inbeelden, Omdat *onder* gemakkelijk met *droevig* geassocieerd kan worden. Maar een *zonsopkomst!* Een tropische zonsopkomst is niet in te beelden, niet te beschrijven en niet na te beelden. . . . [Walcott] ging uit van het Caribische gebied."²⁰

Interestingly, Arion never wrote his novels in Papiamentu. In an interview, he explained that while Papiamentu is crucial for the development of Curaçaoan literature, more significant and better-known novels are written in Dutch.²¹ He discusses how Pierre Lauffer initiated a movement around 1940, exploring the potential of Papiamentu as a poetic and literary language. Lauffer, renowned for his rhythmic and symbolic use of Papiamentu, experimented in his writing by combining social concerns with personal melancholy.²² However, these early writers worked during an era dominated by Dutch colonial influence, when Dutch was the only language of instruction in schools. This significantly shaped the literary landscape for subsequent generations. As Arion states in the interview,

And I do think that that has to do with the fact that the reading culture is in another language; writing has to do with reading, and you have to read novels to write them. It's not possible to invent the wheel again. Your extensive writing (particularly in prose) at schools is mostly in Dutch, but in Papiamentu you have the songs, the traditional songs, and those things in Papiamentu make poetry easier to write in Papiamentu. So for a long time, I was (while writing poetry in Dutch) looking for rhythms and expressions that were Papiamentu, and I only discovered, very late, that I was trying to write Papiamentu using Dutch, you know? And that's why my poetry is a kind of experiment in Dutch: I'm really looking for Papiamentu.²³

This linguistic experimentation in Arion's work reflects the hybrid nature of Caribbean identity and contributes significantly to the dialogue on Caribbean modernism. The fusion of Euro-

pean and Creole languages creates a unique literary voice. The legacy of the colonial Dutch language, deeply embedded in schoolbooks and formal education, enables this experimentation. This foundation provides a platform from which to challenge and innovate, fostering a distinctive Caribbean literary expression.

De laatste vrijheid can be contextualized within both modern and postmodern literary frameworks. The narrative's modernist elements are evident, as it explores the quest for individual autonomy, a central theme in modern literature, set against the backdrop of societal shifts. Modern life poses significant challenges to individual autonomy in the face of powerful social forces, historical legacies, and external cultural influences.²⁴ Set on a Caribbean island beset by an impending volcanic eruption and cultural conflicts, the novel provides the setting for exploring personal and collective experiences in transformative times. Arion's contributions, deeply embedded in the broader canvas of his era, resonate subtly with the undefined contours of sociopolitical shifts, suggesting a nuanced reflection on the role of literature in the gradual molding of a collective ethos.

Alongside its modernist attributes, the novel also exhibits postmodern characteristics, notably through its critique of dominant narratives and the unmet promises of postcolonial independence. As the book laments, "De onafhankelijkheid van Suriname werd niet de droom die het had. Het ging meer en meer in de richting van de nachtmerrie!" or "Ze had bovendien zo haar reserves tegenover onafhankelijkheid. Het werd steeds aangekondigd als een gift voor heel het volk, maar in werkelijkheid scheen het een gift voor slechts een kleine groep te zijn. Degene die in de plaats traden van de expatriates."²⁵ Or as it mocks the postcolonial status of the Dutch Caribbean islands: "We hebben een hele speciale manier om onze afhankelijkheid te vieren. Waar andere staten hun onafhankelijkheidsdag herdenken, vieren wij gewoon een willekeurige dag. Elk eiland heeft er een, zodat niemand de ander iets

hoeft te benijden. We schrijven een prijsvraag uit voor een dag, een volkslied en een vlag. In het lied moet vooral gode dank gebracht worden dat we van dat eiland zijn en niet van een ander. En de zaak is klaar.”²⁶

The volcanic eruption both symbolizes a cultural shift and is a literal natural phenomenon that hinders the shift. It is perceived as an opportunity, and sometimes an island is seen as lacking such a genuine eruption. For example, Daryll states, “Ik ben blij dat op 1 september op Amber het creool wordt ingevoerd. Dat is belangrijker dan de uitbarsting van de vulkaan. Dat is pas een *uitbarsting!* Hier begon mijn leven op opnieuw.”²⁷ In a critique of Curaçao, he remarks that “Curaçao is stil blijven staan. Curaçao is echt een dode vulkaan. Hier [op Amber] is het leven in beweging: het barst uit zou je kunnen zeggen. Het gaat ergens naartoe.”²⁸ Volcanic eruptions represent both danger and potential.

Arion incisively examines issues of ethnic, racial, and gender identity, challenging entrenched power structures. The characters’ lives illustrate these challenges: Daryll, a nurturing father who challenges traditional gender roles, and Aideline, who prioritizes her career over conventional maternal responsibilities. The choice to remain on or leave the island of Amber extends beyond personal consequences, representing a significant political statement. Aideline’s decision to depart for Europe and leave her children behind highlights the fusion of personal and political factors, a key feature of postmodern thought.

Act II: From Turmoil to Transformation: Eruption and Release

Having delineated the linguistic and cultural pillars of Arion’s contributions to Caribbean modernism, we now turn to the critical moments of societal upheaval and transformation depicted in his novel. These historical events impel Arion’s characters to challenge and redefine their identities within the evolving context of the Dutch Caribbean. A central moment in Arion’s narrative is the 30 May 1969 labor strike in Curaçao, a critical juncture catalyzed

by labor disputes at the oil refinery. The workers protested unfair and oppressive conditions, which escalated into a general strike. The labor protest was driven by the unequal treatment and exploitation of workers of the Werkspoor Caribbean (Wescar), a Shell contractor on the island. The labor unions identified that the poor labor conditions were primarily caused by outsourcing to subcontractors, which was exploitative.²⁹ The next day, the labor unions’ protest, joined by “unemployed, disaffected youth,” culminated in a massive popular uprising fueled by dissatisfaction with the island’s racial disparity and the economic and political situation.³⁰ The historic city center went up in flames, with the primary targets being the cars, shops, and businesses of Ashkenazi Jewish and white entrepreneurs, who mostly belonged



Figure 4. Wigbertson Julian Isenia, *Burning of the City Center in 1969*, 2024, digital drawing using a graphics tablet, based on a historical photo from the *Amigoe* newspaper collection (photographer unknown), 37.59 × 34.32 cm (14.8 × 13.51 in.)



Figure 5. Wigbertson Julian Isenia, *Witnesses to the Flames in Punda in 1969*, 2024, digital drawing using graphics tablet, based on a historical photo from the Scriwanek I collection in the National Archive of Curaçao (photographer unknown), 23.41 × 34.32 cm (9.22 × 13.51 in.)



Figure 6. Wigbertson Julian Isenia, *Protesters and the Overturned Burning Car in 1969*, 2024, digital drawing using graphics tablet, based on a historical photo from the Spaarnestad collection in the Dutch National Archive (photographer unknown), 39.15 × 34.32 cm (15.41 × 13.51 in.)

to the white upper social class (see figs. 4, 5, and 6).³¹ As one protester described, “We Curaçaoan workers have woken up from our slumber. We are no longer afraid of struggle, preferably peaceful struggle, but if all else fails, we struggle otherwise.”³²

To quell the unrest, the national government requested the assistance of the Netherlands, which deployed Dutch marines already stationed at a Dutch military base in Curaçao, and additional troops were flown in from abroad. Some activist groups, such as the Dutch Antillean Action Committee in the Netherlands, viewed this as a neocolonial display of militarized power and a move to protect Dutch businesses on the island, such as Shell, Wescar, the Dutch bank ABN, KLM Airlines, the steamship company KNSM, Amstel Brewery, and the gas and electric company OGEM.³³ The following day, the city calmed down, and the trade union leaders demanded that the government resign. The trade unions felt that the govern-

ment was partly to blame for the precarious situation that had led to the protests. Ultimately, early elections were called. The uprising in 1969, which began as a labor protest demanding equal pay for all employees of the Shell oil refinery, created a ripple effect that led to the discussion and addressing of issues of race and class in Curaçaoan society. While some studies characterize this day as destructive, it brought about many structural changes.³⁴

The protest embodied the aspirations of the student movement and the radical Left of the time. As Arion writes about 30 May in *De laatste vrijheid*, “Toen sloegen de vlammen uit de pan. De Vlammen van *verandering!* . . . Ja, de neger werd *mooi* door die brand!”³⁵ He argues that the uprising ignited a new social and political consciousness. Without this fiery revolt, the entrenched racial barriers might have remained unchallenged. Through that fire, a new social and political subject—a new form of consciousness—was born. Change necessitated it.

The 30 May 1969 protests in Curaçao sparked a cultural revolution, bolstering the Afro-Curaçaoan identity and expediting cultural emancipation. This event accelerated the standardization and formalization of Papiamentu orthography, which culminated in its recognition as an official language in 2007. Since then, literary output has been stimulated, with more literature, prose, and plays written in Papiamentu.

Trade union leaders observed a notable increase in self-confidence among Black Curaçaoans, who began to occupy previously inaccessible roles. Politically, the uprising led to significant changes, including the appointments of the first Black governor and lieutenant governor in Curaçao. A new national anthem was composed in 1978, and a Curaçaoan flag and national holiday, Dia di Bandera (day of the flag), were introduced in 1984. However, Antillean left-wing activists who wrote about anticolonial movements and socialist and Marxist ideology before the protest were slightly less enthusiastic about the outcomes. As Harold Hollander, one of the editors of the anticolonial and Marxist magazine *Kambio* in the Neth-

erlands, and later of the left-wing magazine *Vitó* in Curaçao, said in an interview in 1999, “De antillianisering is te snel gekomen. Ze konden de situatie niet aan, waren te onervaren. Tot op heden zijn dezelfde politieke structuren intact gebleven, inclusief het patronagesysteem.”³⁶ Moreover, he expressed concerns over homogeneity in political party ideologies and the absence of a robust socialist perspective. These activists lamented that the deeper societal transformations they had envisioned—targeting racial, class, and sexual inequalities—had yet to be achieved.

In *De laatste vrijheid*, Arion offers an analysis of the 30 May 1969 uprising, exploring the evolving interpretations of it over the decades. Initially hailed as a triumph, 30 May began to be seen differently in the 1970s, as symbolizing a broader struggle against colonial and imperialist forces by the radical Left. By the 1980s, the narrative became more complex and critical. By the 1990s, reflection on 30 May was more contemplative and increasingly skeptical.³⁷ Arion characterized the 1969 uprising as a watershed year marked by transformative anger and heightened awareness. He also attributed the resurgence of Papiamentu to the Trinta di Mei 1969 (30 May 1969) protests, emphasizing the language’s historical role as a covert medium: “Trinta di Mei allowed us to recognize the subversive treasure we had in our language, which existed for centuries so we could keep secrets from the Dutch.”³⁸

In *De laatste vrijheid*, Arion focuses on the protagonist Daryll, who relocates from Curaçao to Amber following the events of 30 May 1969, seeking freedom. Daryll explains, “Ik ben daar niet gelukkig, omdat ik een onafhankelijk voelend mens, die het liefst leeft in een onafhankelijk en vrij land. En dat kan op Curaçao niet. Het eiland is van Holland. Het leek erop dat het op weg naar de vrijheid was, maar dat is nu teruggedraaid.”³⁹ This sentiment of freedom reflects the national political decolonization of the islands, which officially decolonized the Dutch Caribbean islands yet kept them within the Kingdom of the Netherlands with more autonomy, and also reflects a desire for the freedom that the protests seemed to promise.

Daryll's move to Amber is influenced by the island's plan to introduce the Creole language as the official language of instructions in schools. The implementation of the Creole language is important, but it is only the beginning; it will be followed by "the last freedom," a more comprehensive and ultimate freedom: the modernist freedom to pursue autonomy, self-determination, and the emancipation of the individual or community from oppressive structures.

Arion's narrative includes exploration of a transgender character. Although various cultural practices reflect on the events of 30 May, the only significant representation of a trans* or queer figure among them appears in this book—as a metaphorical volcano, portrayed as the harbinger of a potential apocalyptic future. In the novel, Daryll's newfound freedom is imperiled by a volcano, personified in the book's introductory chapter as a trans* person who underwent a sex change. The volcano is first introduced as undergoing "een geslachtsverandering, die een groot bedoel bruiloft op beschamende wijze in de war stuurt."⁴⁰ The wedding would be the introduction of the local Creole in all schools, something that locals were preparing for thirty years. The volcano underwent "een karakterverandering."⁴¹

Arion extends this gendered perspective further in the book, intersecting with the notion of stereotypical femininity within stereotypical masculinity, as Daryll has always been the nurturing parent to their children. Conversely, it explores masculinity within femininity, exemplified by Adeline prioritizing her career over staying with her children. Daryll states, "Ik ben niet alleen hun vader. Ik ben vooral hun moeder. . . . In *The Castle of My Skin* van George Lamming [is er een bekende uitspraak:] My mother who fathered me. . . . Voor mijn kinderen is het: My father who mothered me."⁴² More explicitly,

Hij had heel nadrukkelijk en specifiek een andere man willen zijn dan de meeste van zijn leeftijdgenoten. Hij had het machismo willen overwinnen en het was hem gelukt. Hij had de achterwerkjes van zijn baby'tjes schoongemaakt en hun luiers verwisseld. Hij was midden in de nacht opgestaan om ze eten te geven, omdat zijn vrouw de vol-

gende ochtend weer vroeg op het werk moest zijn punt hij had zijn slaap opgeofferd. Hij had zich seksueel terughoudend gedragen, en zich vooral geconcentreerd op wat haar behaagde.⁴³

Or as Daryll explains about Adeline's career choices, "Ik moest het eerder als een eer zien, zei ze, dat ze zoiets kon doen [voor haar carrière kiezen]; met een rustig geweten weggaan, omdat ze wist dat ik niet alleen een vader maar ook een moeder voor de kinderen was."⁴⁴ And finally, "Ze kreeg de mannelijkheid die ze wilde, zoveel ze wilde cadeau. Hij stond haar zijn mannelijkheid af. Hij werd vrouw ja dat betekende het enige, dat hij voor hun twee kinderen niet echt gedaan had, was ze in zijn buik dragen, baren en borstvoeding geven."⁴⁵ However, Arion's depiction of gender roles, while attempting to subvert traditional binaries, inadvertently reinforces them by aligning nurturing with femininity and career ambition with masculinity. This binary approach oversimplifies the complexities of gender identity and roles. This binary idea is also applied to the volcano, which was seen for a long time as a "man" but is actually a transgender person, and sometimes implicitly a transgender man, who had "een regelmatige, onontkoombaar terugkerende cyclus. Een menstruatie! Alleen was de cyclus van de vulkaan geen maand maar vijfhonderd jaar."⁴⁶

While a volcano can be interpreted as a revered force of nature that demands respect and care, as in Indigenous traditions, Arion depicts it in a manner that perpetuates heteronormative, transphobic, and sexist ideologies. The novel links the volcano to nationalist and culturalist agendas, portraying it as a phenomenon capable of negating the promotion of the Creole language. The narrative surrounding the protests and their aftermath essentially reinforces a perspective that is heteronormative, heterosexual, cisgender, misogynistic, and antitrans. This portrayal of the volcano ambiguously as a trans* male-to-female person in-

volves preconceived notions of gender roles and stereotypes about who can be a hero, who is imagined as part of the postcolonial country, and who is seen as a cause of destruction.

Queer or trans* characters are relatively rare in the Dutch Caribbean literary canon, yet the few works that address these themes provide critical insights. For instance, in Willem Kroon's 1923 novel *E no por casa* (She cannot marry), written in Papiamentu, the character Josefa is depicted as a woman who pursues same-sex relationships, offering a valuable perspective on how non-heteronormative identities are perceived.⁴⁷ She embodies shifting societal norms in the postindustrial era, marked by the establishment of an oil refinery on the island in the 1910s. During this period, writers associated with the Roman Catholic Church, wary of what they perceived as the dangers of modern life, used characters such as Josefa to denounce these emerging “sinful” lifestyles.

In Arion's narrative, the volcano is symbolically depicted as a disruptive force opposing cultural change. This force explicitly threatens the campaign Daryll leads to replace the colonial French language with Creole in the educational system. Both Josefa and the volcano are portrayed as figures that catalyze societal tension as they navigate the complexities of cultural transformation and resistance. Ultimately, despite a few casualties, the damage caused by these tensions is minimal. The book concludes, “De scholen zouden op 1 september beginnen, met het Creool als voertaal.”⁴⁸

Volcanoes represented as trans* figures are often depicted as forces that destroy the existing world order and that can obstruct postcolonial nation-building efforts, such as the adoption of Creole as an official language. To challenge these simplistic and binary constructs, it is crucial to amplify the voices of marginalized and underrepresented individuals in narratives surrounding and following 30 May 1969. As Aisha Leer summons us, we must *no lubidá e muhé* (not forget women)—and, I would add, transgender people—in the retelling of Trinta di Mei.⁴⁹

Act III: Dissonant Echoes and Pleasure

The scholarly discourse on Arion's *De laatste vrijheid* overlooks his portrayal of the volcano as a trans* person. At first glance, this depiction might seem to reinforce rather than subvert negative stereotypes. However, a more in-depth analysis suggests that Arion strategically uses these tropes to critically examine societal views of trans* identities. Arion depicts the volcano in a manner that perpetuates heteronormative, transphobic, and sexist ideologies. However, by incorporating this symbolism into Caribbean naturalism, Arion seems to subtly challenge these prevailing narratives surrounding transgender lives within a postcolonial framework, rather than reaffirm them. This nuanced approach serves to question traditional narratives and fosters a deeper examination of identity complexities in postcolonial



Figure 7. Kwynn Johnson, *Volcano Triptych 5/21*, 2021, graphite and watercolor on 140-lb. cold-pressed paper, each panel 22.5 × 15 cm (8.66 × 5.9 in.). Collection of Kwynn Johnson

contexts. This interpretive layer, although not explicitly stated by Arion, emerges through a critical reading against the grain, suggesting his intent to provoke thoughtful reassessment and dialogue.

This section integrates insights from transgender studies into broader discussions of Caribbean modernism and environmentalism, highlighting the intersections with themes of natural disasters, identity, and resistance. In the analysis, the volcano is anthropomorphized and likened to societal misrepresentations of transgender people, often unfairly labeled as “monsters.” This harmful stereotype portrays transgender individuals as frightening or unnatural, which can lead to dehumanization and justify mistreatment.

The volcano, depicted as a trans* person, is categorized as a natural entity rather than a human one, suggesting a separation from human identity and experiences. In the novel, Arion writes, “Twist en oorlog zijn het teken, dat er hoe dan ook mensen in de buurt zijn; maar onbevattelijke natuurmanifestaties als overstromingen, orkanen, vulkaanuitbarstingen, bevestigen voor mij dat de natuur niet voor mensen bedoeld is.”⁵⁰ This reflects the unpredictable and uncontrollable aspects of nature, paralleling societal perceptions of gender fluidity. Oren Gozlan’s concept of the “monstrous transsexual” in bathroom debates illustrates these deep-seated societal anxieties and unconscious fantasies about gender fluidity and identity.⁵¹ Through this critical examination, I seek here to underscore the complexities of representation and the impact of cultural narratives on marginalized communities. This examination of gender fluidity bares fundamental societal tensions, while also fostering a transformative narrative that reflects the seismic shifts occurring across the Caribbean landscape.⁵²

Building on Harlan Weaver’s interpretation of monstrous anger, which itself draws on Susan Stryker’s work on trans* rage, this discussion explores the metaphorical significance of

volcanic transformation. Transitioning from the societal implications of gender fluidity, I draw a parallel between the emotional upheavals of trans* rage and volcanic disruptions in Caribbean modernism. This comparison portrays volcanic eruptions as moments of profound change that reshape the physical landscape and the conceptual terrain of gender.⁵³

Joseph M. Pierce’s assertion that “if modernity is that ideal, that architecture of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that determines the futurity of all peoples, then modernity too must be rendered ash” resonates deeply in this context.⁵⁴ This perspective suggests that the explosive potential of volcanoes and the transformative rage of trans* individuals alike serve to challenge and disrupt normative structures of identity and recognition. Pierce argues that “if colonization is an enterprise, then it is a thirst for death and debt. If settlers rely on a capitalist economy to prove their civilization, then that economy and that civilization must end, must be rendered a distant memory and a cautionary tale, if this world is to have a future.”⁵⁵ This notion underscores the imperative to dismantle the very foundations of modernity—capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. These entrenched structures must be obliterated and relegated to a distant memory. Such a radical transformation challenges existing power dynamics, paving the way for a future grounded in inclusivity and justice. Similarly, Stryker argues that the figure of Victor Frankenstein’s monster serves as a metaphor for the transgender experience, embodying a form of transgender rage that challenges and disrupts normative structures of identity and recognition. Encountering a transgender person’s body and consciousness reveals that the concept of “natural” is socially constructed. This realization can evoke feelings of violation and loss imposed by the gender system. While transgender people often suffer from others’ reactions, they also demonstrate that meaningful change and action are possible even within oppressive systems.⁵⁶

Weaver contends that this rage, experienced through the prism of transsexuality and personified by the figure of Frankenstein’s monster, gives rise to a distinctive form of anger. This

anger, likened to the enveloping embrace of a kraken, penetrates into the act of reading, transforming, and facilitating change by drawing the reader into a deeply emotional engagement with the narrative.⁵⁷ This narrative of disruption transcends physical landscapes and extends into the realms of literature and theory, where the act of reading itself becomes a revolutionary experience. This process reshapes our perceptions of identity and gender, guiding us through a profoundly emotional journey that challenges and redefines conventional understandings.

In a trans* response to natural disasters, or natural disasters as trans*, our challenging of traditional narratives that surround environmental crises can pave the way for more sustainable and inclusive futures. By integrating these diverse threads of thought, we situate ourselves at the intersection of transgender studies and Caribbean studies, emphasizing their importance in exploring the relationships between identity, power, and the natural world. This integrative and transformative approach mirrors that of Kwynn Johnson's *Quiet as Drawings*, which reveals the Caribbean's volcanic history and its contemporary implications.

In the essay "Visualizing the Volcanic Caribbean," Johnson, an artist from Trinidad, presents a selection of her drawings from her art exhibition titled *Quiet as Drawings*. The show opened in March 2021 at Soft Box Art Gallery in Port of Spain, Trinidad.⁵⁸ This collection, comprising twenty-one graphite and watercolor triptychs (see fig. 7), is inspired by the 1957 novel *La danse sur le volcan* by Haitian author Marie Vieux-Chauvet.⁵⁹ Set on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, the novel serves as a backdrop for Johnson's series, which is placed in a contemporary volcanic landscape. The series acts as a visual metaphor for the significant shifts within Caribbean modernism, akin to the metamorphic processes of a volcano. It adeptly captures the dynamic tension between historical upheaval and the enduring Caribbean terrain, symbolized through the imagery of volcanoes. Johnson's work goes beyond simple representation, using a limited color scheme to explore the lives of two

women during a volcanic eruption. This focus disrupts the binary of destruction and renewal, prompting a deeper examination of the effects of disasters and their wider social impact. It encourages viewers to engage with both the historical and contemporary realities of the Caribbean, echoing the transformative potential of volcanoes discussed earlier.

In this essay, I have focused on the "what" and "when" aspects of Caribbean modernism. However, I have also continually considered other questions, such as "why" Caribbean modernism is necessary to study and "why now" is the opportune time for this inquiry. In *Patterns of Dissonance*, Rosi Braidotti examines the postmodernist trend that positions the notion of "woman" as a symbol of radical otherness, thereby placing it at the forefront of theoretical discourse. This examination provides a contextual background that helps our understanding of similar marginalization within Caribbean modernism.⁶⁰ This trend might be interpreted as the feminization of postmodern thought, initially suggesting a positive shift toward recognizing femininity. However, Braidotti cautions feminists to scrutinize this trend critically. She contends that simply emphasizing femininity within theoretical frameworks does not ensure that women's issues, needs, and claims are genuinely addressed.⁶¹ Moreover, the postmodernist proclamation of the "death of the subject" complicates matters further by reducing individuals, or "women," to mere linguistic and cultural constructs, potentially overlooking the actual lived realities and individual experiences of women. This reflection on the role of women in postmodern thought leads us to a broader consideration of how we interpret and engage with complex identities and experiences within the Caribbean, mirroring the depth of analysis found in Johnson's artwork.

Braidotti warns that the theoretical embrace of the feminine may be more stylistic than substantive and more symbolic than genuine. She stresses the importance of not assuming that these theoretical discussions will automatically lead to a profound understanding of, or advocacy for, women's rights and issues. Therefore, she urges feminists to critically assess

whether the focus on femininity in postmodernism truly aligns with feminist goals or whether it is merely a superficial, token gesture. Our examination here of the role of transgender people within postmodernist trends, as critiqued by Braidotti, has evolved into a broader reflection on the inclusivity of modernist and postmodernist frameworks. Braidotti's insistence on a critical evaluation of how the feminine is treated within theoretical discourse parallels this essay's inquiry into modernism's ability to authentically represent diverse experiences and identities. This critique of postmodernism's potential for tokenism calls for deeper, more meaningful engagement with the central issues of gender and identity studies.

Having examined first feminism's theoretical challenges in postmodernism, then the use of metaphor in Caribbean cultural analysis, this discussion has moved from abstract feminist debates to concrete explorations of identity and sexuality. Although this essay's sections are rooted in different contexts, they unite in their scrutiny of gender, identity, and societal norms, underscoring the necessity of nuanced, interdisciplinary approaches to complex issues of representation and advocacy. Vanessa Agard-Jones offers an example of this interdisciplinary approach by drawing a compelling comparison between the eruption of Saint-Pierre's volcano and the destruction of biblical city of Sodom.⁶² She references Jacqui Alexander's critique of the Sodom metaphor's overwhelming and distorting influence on the interpretation of events and behaviors, especially those relating to nonnormative sexual practices, arguing that it overshadows other possible understandings.⁶³ However, Agard-Jones invites us to consider how the repeated use of the Sodom image could reveal insights into Saint-Pierre society's life and unspoken aspects at the beginning of the twentieth century. The metaphor may have been a covert way to discuss topics that were otherwise taboo, such as same-sex desire, nonconventional relationships, and gender nonconformity.⁶⁴

Agard-Jones suggests that instead of viewing references to Sodom merely as moralistic judgments, we could understand them as subtle acknowledgments of a spectrum of behav-

iors and identities that could not be openly acknowledged or recorded in historical narratives. The volcano metaphor aptly encapsulates the dynamic and transformative nature of transgender studies, identities, and practices. As Emmanuel David notes, a volcano's geological process creates new land masses and fundamentally alters existing landscapes.⁶⁵ This natural phenomenon mirrors the progressive evolution of transgender studies, a field that continually redefines and broadens our comprehension of gender identities and expressions. The volcanic metaphor emphasizes the potency and impact of these shifts, highlighting how transgender studies, like volcanic activity, brings forth new formations in the landscape of gender understanding while reconfiguring existing perceptions and norms.

My analysis here has drawn on Jack Halberstam's concept of "failure" to explore the potential for political activism and change that emerges from queer and trans* deviations from societal norms.⁶⁶ This notion of failure as a catalyst for transformation aligns with the central theme of this essay, underscoring the potential of disruption—whether through volcanic eruptions or the vocalization of marginalized voices—to forge new pathways and possibilities. Investigating Arion's legacy is both timely and essential, prompting us to consider the "what" and "when" and the "why." The transformative spirit of Caribbean modernism, transgender studies, and environmentalism advocates for a world where the ashes of outdated structures can give rise to a scenery enriched with diversity, inclusivity, and empowerment—provided we are open to being transformed by its impact.

Endnotes

- 1 For more information on Guene, see Frank Martinus Arion, “The Value of Guene for Folklore and Literary Culture,” *History of Literature in the Caribbean 2* (2001): 415–19; Arion, “The Guene Kriole of the Netherlands Antilles: Its Theoretical and Practical Consequences for Better Understanding Papiamentu and Other Portuguese-Based Creoles,” in *Anales del Caribe*, 1984, 4–5; and Bart Jacobs, “The Upper Guinea Origins of Papiamentu: Linguistic and Historical Evidence,” *Diachronica* 26, no. 3 (2009): 319–79.
- 2 In Aruba, Papiamentu is spoken. Papiamentu has an etymologically structured spelling, while Papiamentu has a phonetically structured spelling.
- 3 S. Delgado, P. Angeli Lecompte, H. Lao, D. Ursulin Mopsus, E. Echteld, R. Severing, and N. Faraclas, “Education, Languages in Contact, and Popular Culture in the Hispanophone, Francophone, and Dutch Caribbean,” in N. Faraclas, R. Severing, C. Weijer, E. Echteld, W. Rutgers, and D. Dupey, eds., *Embracing Multiple Identities: Opting Out of Neocolonial Monolingualism, Monoculturalism and Mono-identification in the Dutch Caribbean* (Willemstad: University of Curaçao, 2016), 85–94.
- 4 Rose Mary Allen, “The Harvest Ceremony Seú as a Case Study of the Dynamics of Power in Post-emancipation Curaçao (1863–1915),” *Caribbean Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2010): 13–29.
- 5 Allen, “The Harvest Ceremony Seú.”
- 6 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 401.
- 7 Anita Patterson, “‘I’ve Known Rivers’: Langston Hughes, Jacques Roumain, and the Emergence of Caribbean Modernism,” *Langston Hughes Review* 27, no. 1 (2021): 12–28.
- 8 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 9 “Amber is distinctive in that it abolished slavery without compensating the slave owners.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 13. Throughout this essay, translations of quoted passages from the novel are mine.
- 10 The Netherlands Antilles was the legal designation for the Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten until 1986, functioning as a country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1986, Aruba obtained a separate status (Status Aparte), while the other islands remained within this structure. After 2010, the Netherlands Antilles ceased to exist. Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten became autonomous countries within the kingdom, while Bonaire, Saba, and Sint Eustatius became special municipalities of the Netherlands.
“Sad island, sad people.” Cola Debrot, “Kwatrijnen uit Willemstad: December 1969,” *Ruku* 2, no. 2–3 (1970): 17.
- 11 Joris Gerits, “De receptie van Arions *De laatste vrijheid* kroniek,” *Dietsche Warande in Belfort, Jaargang 140* (1995): 657.
- 12 See Michael J. Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); and Leah Rosenberg, “Caribbean Models for Modernism in the Work of Claude McKay and Jean Rhys,” *Modernism/Modernity* 11, no. 2 (1 April 2004): 219–38.
- 13 Richard Begam and Michael Moses, *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899–1939* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Harper Montgomery, *The Mobility of Modernism: Art and Criticism in 1920s Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Samantha A. Noël, *Tropical Aesthetics of Black Modernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).
- 14 Ronald Severing, “Recurrent Themes in the Work of Frank Martinus Arion,” in Nicholas Faraclas et al., eds., *Researching the Rhizome: Studies of Transcultural Language, Literature, Learning, and Life on the ABC Islands and Beyond* (Willemstad: University of Curaçao, 2013), 290.
- 15 Severing, “Recurrent Themes in the Work of Frank Martinus Arion,” 291.
- 16 Severing, “Recurrent Themes in the Work of Frank Martinus Arion.”
- 17 V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies, British, French, and Dutch in the West Indies and South America* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 29.
- 18 “Any contribution that could challenge Naipaul’s pessimistic view of the Caribbean was welcomed in Grenada.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 100.
- 19 “All his books were full of sunrise.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 274; italics in original.
- 20 “Europeans primarily see the sunset in the tropics. . . . They can easily imagine a tropical *sunset* because it can be easily associated with sadness. However, a *sunrise*! A tropical sunrise is unimaginable, indescribable, and irreproducible. . . . [Walcott’s] point of departure was the Caribbean.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 274.
- 21 Charles H. Rowell and Frank Martinus Arion, “An Interview with Frank Martinus Arion,” *Callaloo* 21, no. 3 (1 June 1998): 538–41.
- 22 Wim Rutgers, “Literary Magazines and Poetry in the Netherlands Antilles,” in A. James Arnold, ed., *A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001), 564.
- 23 Rowell and Arion, “An Interview with Frank Martinus Arion,” 541.
- 24 Michael Levenson, *Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 105.
- 25 “The independence of Suriname did not become the dream it was supposed to be. It increasingly turned into a nightmare!”; “She also had her reservations about independence. It was always announced as a gift for the entire people, but in reality, it seemed to be a gift for only a small group. Those who replaced the expatriates.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 97, 121.
- 26 “We have a very special way of celebrating our dependency. Where other states commemorate their Independence Day, we just celebrate a random day. Each island has one, so no one must envy another. We hold a contest for a day, a national anthem, and a flag. The song must especially give thanks that we are from that island and not another. And that settles it.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 181.
- 27 “I am glad that on 1 September, Creole will be introduced on Amber. That is more important than the eruption of the volcano. That is a real *eruption*! Here my life begins anew.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 247.
- 28 “Curaçao has stood still. Curaçao is truly a dead volcano. Here [on Amber], life is in motion: you could say it is erupting. It’s going somewhere.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 247.
- 29 Louis Philippe Romer, “May 30, 1969,” in Wim Kamps, Guido Rojer, and Iteke Witteveen, eds., *Contemporary Curaçao: A Caribbean Community* (Willemstad, Curaçao: Carib, 2013), 53–56.
- 30 Romer, “May 30, 1969,” 54.
- 31 Margo Groenewoud, “‘Nou Koest, Nou Kalm,’ De ontwikkeling van de Curaçaose samenleving, 1915–1973,” PhD diss., University of Leiden, 192.
- 32 Romer, “May 30, 1969,” 54.
- 33 “Het Nederlands koloniaal systeem toegepast op de ‘Nederlandse’ Antillen” (The Dutch colonial system applied to the “Netherlands” Antilles) (Amsterdam: [Aksikomite van Antiliannen in Nederland] Nationaal Archief, 1971).
- 34 William A. Anderson and Russell R. Dynes, “Civil Disturbances and Social Change: Comparative Analysis of the United States and Curaçao,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1976): 47.
- 35 “The fire broke out. The flames of change. . . . Yes, the Negro became beautiful because of that fire!” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 76; italics in original.
- 36 “Antillianization came too quickly. They [the new people in power] could not cope with the situation, were too inexperienced. To date, the same political structures have remained intact, including the patronage system.” Gert Oostindie, *Curaçao, 30 Mei 1969: Verhalen over de revolte* (Curaçao, 30 May 1969: Stories about the revolt) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 52; my translation.
- 37 Gerrit Willem Rutgers, *De brug van Paramaribo naar Willemstad: Nederlands-Caribische en Caribisch-Nederlandse literatuur, 1945–2005* (Willemstad: Fundashon pa Planifikashon di Idioma, Universiteit van de Nederlandse Antillen, 2007).
- 38 Simon Romero, “A Language Thrives in Its Caribbean Home,” *New York Times*, 4 July 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/05/world/americas/05curacao.html>. This deserves some nuance in that, historically, most social strata on the island, including different racial groups, could speak Papiamentu. However, the current situation may have changed, necessitating additional research.
- 39 “I am not happy there because I am an independent-minded person who prefers to live in an independent and free country. In addition, that is not possible on Curaçao. The island belongs to Holland. It seemed to be on the path to freedom, but that has now been reversed.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 246.
- 40 “A sex change that disruptively complicates a major wedding in an embarrassing manner.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 11.
- 41 “A character change.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 19.
- 42 “I am not just their father. I am primarily their mother. . . . This concept echoes a famous line from George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*: My mother who fathered me. . . . For my children, it is reversed: My father who mothered me.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 67.
- 43 “He had deliberately and explicitly aimed to be different from most men of his generation. He sought to overcome machismo, and he succeeded. He cleaned his babies’ bottoms and changed their diapers. He got up in the middle of the night to feed them because his wife had to go to work early the next morning, sacrificing his own sleep. He exercised sexual restraint, focusing primarily on what pleased his partner.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 94.
- 44 “She said I should see it as an honor that she could do such a thing [choose her career]; leave with a clear conscience because she knew that I was not just a father but also a mother to the children.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 107.
- 45 “She received the masculinity she wanted, as much as she wanted, as a gift. He surrendered his masculinity to her. Yes, he became a woman—that meant the only thing he hadn’t truly done for their two children was carry them in his womb,

- give birth, and breastfeed them.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 117.
- 46 “A regular, inescapably recurring cycle. A menstruation cycle! Only the cycle of the volcano was not a month but five hundred years.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 31.
- 47 Wigbertson Julian Isenia, “Looking for Kambrada: Sexuality and Social Anxieties in the Dutch Colonial Archive, 1882–1923,” *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 22, no. 2 (2019): 125–43.
- 48 “Schools were to start on 1 September, with Creole as the language of instruction”; Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 314.
- 49 Aisha Leer, “No Lubidá e Muhé [Do Not Forget the Woman]: A Short Biography of Women [sic] Involvement in Vito,” *Kristof* 10, no. 2 (2019): 10–16.
- 50 “Strife and war are the sign, that people are around no matter what; but incomprehensible natural manifestations like floods, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions confirm to me that nature is not meant for humans.” Arion, *De laatste vrijheid*, 84.
- 51 Oren Gozlan, “Stalled on the Stall: Reflections on a Strained Discourse,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 3–4 (2017): 451–71.
- 52 Anson Koch-Rein, “Monster,” *TSQ : Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 134–35.
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