

Alicante Journal of English Studies 25(2012): 269-282

“Decipher its noises for us”: Understanding Sycorax’s Island in Marina Warner’s *Indigo*

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ABSTRACT

The Marina Warner’s novel *Indigo, or Mapping the Waters* (1992) explores the effects of colonialism on the islanders of Liamuiga and the Everard family through a complex retelling of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* that spans over three hundred years. Much like the appropriative novels of Gloria Naylor, in which past and present blend and meld, *Indigo* also suggests that time is not linear in its development. The subtitle, *or Mapping the Waters*, positions a sense of place at the crux of Warner’s novel. Moving back and forth between the twentieth century and the dawn of the seventeenth century, the novel also shifts between London and the Caribbean, suggesting the global import of Shakespeare’s late romance. The scene, in the Burkean sense, influences the actions of the characters as they struggle to be heard in their respective settings. Language also affects the ways in which these characters come to terms with their personal histories. Ultimately, the novel seeks to displace the hopelessness of Caliban’s decree in *The Tempest* —“You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is I know how to curse” (1.2.364-65)— by giving a voice to the people silenced by colonialism.

1. Engaging with *The Tempest*

In the massive body of criticism devoted to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Prospero and Caliban receive much more attention than the female characters presented in the play. Rewritings, such as Iris Murdoch’s *The Sea, the Sea*, appear to be informed by a focus on Prospero as the artist, as reflected by essays such as Robert Egan’s ““This rough

magic': Perspectives of Art and Morality in *The Tempest*" (1972). Later criticism reveals the shift from reading the morality of Prospero's "white" magic to interrogating the implications of colonialism in the "brave new world" (5.1.182). For example, Alden and Virginia Vaughan's *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (1991) clearly focuses on the construction of Caliban as "a freckled whelp, hag-born" by the colonizers (1.2.283). Similarly, Paul Brown's seminal essay, "'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism" (1985) and Stephen Greenblatt's much-cited *Learning to Curse* (1999) both focus on the relationship between colonizer and colonized.

As most critics considering Warner's novel contend, *Indigo* privileges the stories of Shakespeare's Miranda, Ariel, and the absent Sycorax over the plight of Caliban. In her article, Caroline Cakebread discusses the double colonization that native women experience, being doubly Othered by their biological sex and race. Cakebread claims that "Warner moves beyond the vocabulary of master and slave implicit in [George] Lamming's work and takes up the curse of silence that characterizes the female experience of colonization" (1999: 225). Giving a voice to these silenced women by creating a space for Bakhtinian heteroglossia is closely linked to the scene(s) and to *The Tempest* as the major source text in *Indigo*. Oscillating between two islands connected by colonialism, the bulk of the novel takes place in England and Liamuiga. Warner's project also unites these two disparate places by invoking Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Kate Chedgzoy notes that most postcolonial responses to *The Tempest* "focus on Caliban as a figure of resistance. Where they notice Miranda's existence at all, they usually take her to be complicit in Prospero's oppressive project..." (1995: 96). While Warner does not deny "the brutalization of Caliban," as discussed by Chantal Zabus, she does present a gynocentric focus in her rewriting of Shakespeare's late romance (2002: 140). Many critics find Warner's approach to revision exciting. According to Ángeles de la Concha, "Warner does not just shift perspectives bringing about a subsequent reversal of the hierarchic categories at the basis of the play, she has chosen to deconstruct" (2002: 84). On one level, Warner's motivation to "deconstruct" *The Tempest* is personal.

Much in the same vein as Jane Smiley's personal essays "Shakespeare in Iceland" (1999) and "Taking It All Back" (2003) concerning her gynocentric revision of *King Lear*, *A Thousand Acres* (1991), Marina Warner also discusses her reasons for reimagining *The Tempest*. In "Between the Colonist and the Creole: Family Bonds, Family Boundaries" (1993), Warner discusses her family's involvement in English colonialism, specifically in the Caribbean, and her Creole background. Warner explains that "the French include whites in the term Creole, and so do the Spanish, but to English ears, 'Creole' sounds foreign, French, or worse, native, but native of another place besides England" (1993: 199). In this regard, she fashions the contemporary Everard family after her own experience of being considered exotic. Warner, however, does not claim the right to self-identify as Creole, because she feels that "the relations of the former plantocracy to the islands which they colonised and inhabited for nearly three hundred years make it fallacious, even opportunistic, for a descendant now to grasp the

label and wear it with new pride" (1993: 199). Warner's decision to resist using "the label" is best described by Chedgzoy, who argues convincingly that "*Indigo* does not presume to offer access to the 'authentic' experience of colonised native women; rather it self-consciously represents a white author's textualisation of black women's voices" (1995: 124). In crafting these voices, Warner completed much research on her family's colonial role and used that information in creating the Everard family. One particularly interesting choice that Warner makes concerns an island youth who helped to shape her grandfather's brilliant career in cricket. Based on Warner's research, she found that her grandfather's first memories of playing cricket involved a young islander "who rejoiced in the name of Killebree" (1993: 200). In the novel, Warner creates the fictional sport of "Flinders" to represent cricket, and Sir Anthony "Ant" Everard is one of that sport's greatest heroes. Warner explains that "the image of Killebree [...] stuck in my mind and helped inspire the reckoning I attempted in *Indigo*" (1993: 200). One literal way in which Warner seeks to credit Killebree is by giving this family name to one of her novel's most important characters, Serafine.

2. The oral tradition and history in *Indigo*

Indigo begins in 1960s London with a story told in the oral tradition by Serafine Killebree, a native islander lovingly called "Feeny" by her employers, the Everard family. Feeny tells young Miranda Everard the story of King Midas, a story that has significance later in the novel. The significance of this story is at least twofold: it speaks to the relationship between Anthony Everard and his daughter, Xanthe. It also establishes the importance of fairytales in the novel. Young Miranda adores Feeny and the stories the older woman tells. As a child, Miranda notes that "in her stories everything risked changing shape," indicating on one level the alterations to the fairy tales Feeny tells but, perhaps more significantly, on another level the instability of history (Warner, 1992: 22). Miranda repeatedly associates Feeny's storytelling with her hands, observing that:

Serafine's palms were mapped with darker lines, as if she had steeped them in ink to bring out the pattern; the lines crisscrossed and wandered, and Miranda would have liked to be able to puzzle out the script, for she was beginning to read. Feeny's palms were dry and hard like the paper in a storybook, and when they handled Miranda she felt safe. (Warner, 1992: 22)

This rich passage says much about the novel's interconnected stories and establishes the strong bond between Serafine and Miranda. Serafine's "mapped" hands bring to mind the colonial expeditions, intent on claiming and mapping land, which ultimately brought Serafine so far away from her native island to England. That her hands appear "steeped in ink" suggests Serafine's connection to her homeland and the steeping of indigo associated with Sycorax in the novel's other narrative. Zabus indicates the larger significance of Serafine's storytelling by positioning her as an

important part of “a female continuum of orality” (2002: 146). Cakebread also notes the import of Feeny’s stories; she argues that “Serafine’s oral stories —told to young Miranda in the kitchen or in the nursery— become an alternative family history in *Indigo*,” suggesting a means of voicing the silenced and also a possible return to the matriarchal ordering of Sycorax’s world before the arrival of Miranda’s ancestor (1999: 224). The ordering of the island, pre-colonization, is patriarchal: we learn that Sycorax has been banished from the community by her polygamous husband for suspected witchcraft. My suggestion here is that the world that Sycorax creates on her part of the island is matriarchal; to some extent, she is the authority figure for her adopted children, Ariel and Dulé. She also treats the natural world with respect.

The world of Sycorax is inextricably linked to the present day in Warner’s novel. Serafine’s connection to the mother Sycorax is subtly suggested throughout *Indigo*. Like Sycorax, Serafine also has associations with magic: “Serafine could still conjure *Enfant-Béate* when she wanted” (Warner, 1992: 66). While this use of conjuring implies Serafine’s skill as a storyteller more than her magical abilities, she too receives the label of “witch” in the novel. In a scene that suggests multiple forms of prejudice at play, the aristocratic Gillian, the young wife of Serafine’s employer Anthony Everard, questions Feeny’s place in her world after the birth of the new Everard heir, Xanthe:

Gillian was forever making up to Xanthe the maternal inadequacy she had discovered in herself, to her shame, from the time her baby was born, and Serafine’s comfortable and assured expertise only sharpened her anxieties. Besides, she wished that the woman would call her “your Ladyship,” as she should do, or “my Lady,” or at least “Lady Everard,” instead of that “Miss Gillian,” which sounded so coarse and was anyway so incorrect, almost insulting. They really should get a proper English nanny. It was too bad of Anthony to land her with that old witch. (Warner, 1992: 69)

While Gillian’s use of the label “witch” does not invoke Prospero’s description of Sycorax in *The Tempest* as a “damned witch” known “for mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible,” the usage does operate as a way to Other Serafine and to repudiate her knowledge by aligning it with witchcraft (1.2.263-64). Gillian, later in the same passage, refers to Serafine as a “savage,” claiming, “Not that I’m prejudiced. But I never know what she’s getting up to” (Warner, 1992: 69). By labeling Serafine a “savage,” Gillian does, in fact, appear prejudiced.

3. Warner’s reimagining of Sycorax, Ariel, and Caliban

Also significant in Gillian’s reflections on her relationship with Serafine is the importance of language, specifically of naming in the novel. Gillian believes Serafine’s way of addressing her, as “Miss Gillian,” is disrespectful, primarily because it fails to comfortably distance her from her servant. Although Gillian’s use of Serafine’s nickname, Feeny, may be disrespectful, the rest of the Everard family, particularly Kit and Miranda, appear to use the name as a sign of sincere affection.

While Serafine's name offers insight into her complicated role in the Everard family, as both a member of the family and as a servant, the names of other characters in the novel signal their connections to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Even though some critics, such as Ángeles de la Concha, avoid finding direct correlations between characters sharing the same name between the play and the novel, the Foucauldian idea of a name as a description is difficult to ignore.¹ The Shakespearean names that populate Warner's novel immediately evoke their namesakes. Yet Warner's revision of these characters undermines the notion of reading a name as a description by providing a distinct voice for each character, a voice that does not exist in *The Tempest*. The Shakespearean names that dominate Warner's novel are feminine: Sycorax, Ariel, and Miranda. In an interesting and important alteration, Warner changes the gender of Ariel in her novel, rewriting the character from a masculine spirit to an Arawak woman.² While Prospero and Caliban—in fact, multiple versions of both—are present in *Indigo*, the female characters of *The Tempest* ultimately possess the strongest voices in Warner's novel.

In creating polyglossia out of the closed space of *The Tempest*, Warner fashions her Sycorax out of a few descriptions from Shakespeare's play. We know Shakespeare's Sycorax primarily through Prospero's words. Prospero introduces the absent Sycorax as "the foul witch" and proceeds to negatively portray her "unmitigable rage" (1.2.258, 1.2.276). Based on the scraps of information provided by Prospero and Caliban, it becomes clear that Sycorax lost the island to Prospero by his more powerful "art" (1.2.291). Warner addresses these fragments in her reimagining of Sycorax. Readers hear Sycorax through an omniscient third-person narrator. No longer voiceless, Warner's Sycorax ties together all of the novel's stories—spanning centuries and scenes—notably appearing in the Everard's contemporary tale.

The novel's Sycorax, Janus-like, looks back to Shakespeare's polarizing characterization of her while simultaneously establishing a more nuanced understanding of her role and her influence on the future in *Indigo*. The island of Sycorax is "full of noises," echoing Caliban's description of his home in *The Tempest* (Warner, 1992: 89). Caliban beautifully describes his island in these terms:

The isle is full of noises.
 Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
 That if I then had waked after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
 The clouds, methought, would open and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
 I cried to dream again. (3.2.135-43)

Complicating this description of the setting of Shakespeare's play, Warner's Sycorax is credited by the narrator as "the source of many" of the noises on the island of Liamuiga (Warner, 1992: 89). The narrator also complicates the notion of dreaming

as a comfort in the manner Shakespeare's Caliban presents the activity in his speech through the presentation of Sycorax's troubled dreaming. What Warner essentially does in her depiction of Sycorax, a character denied a voice in Shakespeare's play, is to present a complex account of her background through the omniscient narrator. The narrator almost immediately calls into question Sycorax's powers by implying that the coming of the colonizers signals "the beginning of a new world," a shift that Sycorax does not foresee and appears incapable of stopping (Warner, 1992: 93). Instead, the power Sycorax possesses in the novel appears rooted in the feminine and the domestic—in listening, mothering, and cooperating with the natural world.

In "Between the Colonist and the Creole: Family Bonds, Family Boundaries," Warner expresses her hope that her Sycorax "grows to the dimensions of a full humanity" through her deeply layered presentation of this silenced character (1992: 203). Mothering plays a powerful role in humanizing Sycorax in the novel. Sycorax has had many children of her own, but her most important familial relations involve her two adopted children: Dulé and Ariel. In a pivotal scene, Sycorax has a dream in which she hears the voices of dead slaves, thrown overboard from a passing slave ship: "Sycorax heard their voices in the dark, and all of a sudden, the new space she had entered was lit up as if by lightning, and in a flash she remembered something from the bodies she had laid out before their burial, something she had not properly understood in the strain of tending to their dismemberment and rottenness" (Warner, 1992: 94). The "something" she remembers is the swollen body of a slave woman that she helped bury earlier. Sycorax realizes that "the other men and women, all swollen in their abdomens—a counterfeit fertility; but in that young woman's case, Sycorax had not seen past her outer shape to the form inside" (Warner, 1992: 95). Using an oyster-shell knife, Sycorax removes the still-living baby from the young woman's body; she names the newborn Dulé.

Instead of celebrating this miraculous survival, the villagers read Dulé's birth as a thing to be feared, a sign of "pure witchcraft. Sycorax had cast a spell and brought the dead to life" (Warner, 1992: 96). Others in the village have a problem with the new child because he is an outsider, "the first African to arrive in the islands" (Warner, 1992: 96). In fact, we find that Dulé will always feel "displaced" on the island (Warner, 1992: 104). In a similar vein, Sycorax is banished from her village and sent to live with her brother, who supports her decision to live "outside the nexus of the tribe" (Warner, 1992: 99). In this regard, Warner rewrites Shakespeare's presentation of "This blue-eyed hag [...] brought with child" to the island (1.2.269). In her descriptions of the relationship between Sycorax and Dulé, Warner echoes Shakespeare's language, giving it to the villagers. She describes the villagers' opinion on this relationship: "Her whelp, they said, and she a monster's dam" (1992: 98). We also learn in this section the significance of Dulé's name: "Sycorax gave him the name Dulé, meaning grief, after his birth as an orphan from the sea" (Warner, 1992: 96). Dulé later receives another name from the English colonizers: Caliban, clearly aligning the adopted child of Sycorax with Shakespeare's "poisonous slave" (1.2.318).

While Warner's retelling focuses on feminine voices, Caliban (né Dulé) participates in the heteroglossia made available by the novel. Discussing the changing names of the island, Julie Sanders notes that "nomenclature acts as an unreliable signifier throughout—a process which confirms Caliban's assertion about the intimate relationship between colonial and linguistic power" (2001: 133).³ Unlike Shakespeare's Caliban, who appears powerless when facing Prospero's powerful art, Dulé actively fights against the English colonizers. In *The Tempest*, Caliban's intellect proves superior to that of Trinculo and Stephano, whom he entreats to free him from the "tyrant" Prospero (3.2.40). Caliban repeatedly tells them to seek out the source of Prospero's power, his books:

Having first seized his books, or with a log
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his wezand with thy knife. Remember
First to possess his books, for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command. They all do hate him
As rootedly as I. Burn but his book. (3.2.89-95)

He instructs Trinculo and Stephano not once, but three times to secure Prospero's books before they attack the magician. While Caliban's plan fails—primarily because of the incompetence of his accomplices—he is able to identify the source of Prospero's power. Much in the same vein, Dulé recognizes the source of Kit Everard's power in the heavy artillery he possesses and in his rhetorical skills. Dulé appreciates the currency of language and persuasive powers of the colonizers. He remarks that "their speech is valueless" with regard to the lies they tell the natives (Warner, 1992: 109). Upon the colonizers's arrival on the island, Dulé beseeches Sycorax:

Curse them, Mother. Use your arts, change their condition with your skills, alter their shape, as only you know how. So that they learn to fear us and do not stay. They use our water and eat our substance, they're not welcome. (Warner, 1992: 111)

Instead of heeding Dulé's timely advice, Sycorax urges her adopted son to be hopeful and "have more belief in [their] capacities" (Warner, 1992: 111). Unfortunately, Dulé's fears about the English prove legitimate. After Kit Everard's company attacks Sycorax and Ariel, Dulé organizes an attack on the English. The English are "extraordinarily well-prepared for their attack," and Dulé is "brought to trial as a ringleader, to be an example to others" (Warner, 1992: 201). They are ready for the attack because Ariel inadvertently tips them off. While Warner's Caliban mirrors Shakespeare's insofar as both characters curse their respective lots in life, Warner's novel provides a greater understanding and sense of humanity about this character as well as giving him more agency, despite the restrictive scene and actualization of violence.

Instrumental to preparing the English for Dulé's attack is Sycorax's other adopted child, Ariel, who becomes intimately involved with Kit Everard. While Sebastian and Antonio plot Gonzalo's death in *The Tempest*, Ariel comes to Prospero's loyal councilor and sings to him, stating, "My master through his art foresees the danger / That you, his friend, are in, and send me forth" (2.1.298-99). In a similar vein, Warner's Ariel seeks out Kit, a Prospero figure in his own right, on the night of Dulé's planned attack to demand that he release her from his bonds as a prisoner when he fails to acknowledge their child, Roukoubé. This uncustomary meeting —"Ariel had never summoned him before"— alerts Kit that something is wrong (Warner, 1992: 182). As he reflects on this unusual encounter, Kit sees the plan "as clear as a map of a well-charted route unfolded on the captain's table, what lay in store for him and for the settlement" (Warner, 1992: 185). He promptly repositions the English troops and handily defeats the uprising natives.

Before Kit's arrival and Ariel's affair with him, we learn much about Sycorax's adopted daughter. Warner rewrites Ariel as another outsider, like Dulé, but chooses to make this character female. An Arawak, Ariel is abandoned by her biological mother to save her daughter from a life of sexual servitude as a slave. Sycorax's brother decides that his sister would be the best "foster mother" for the young girl. Ariel is described as "a solitary, a dreamer, she doesn't fit in". Sycorax's brother assures his sister that the young girl would be "a help" to her, specifically in dyeing the indigo that has become Sycorax's trade and the reason for her blue eyes (Warner, 1992: 106).⁴ So, it comes to pass that Ariel lives with Sycorax, and the older woman grows attached to her adopted daughter. We learn that "the love for Ariel that grew in Sycorax was greater than any she had felt for the children she had borne; it was sweeter than the passion for survival that had attached her to Dulé" (Warner, 1992: 114). In addition to establishing the bond between these two women, this description also anticipates the fragments of information about this relationship present in *The Tempest*.

After suffering through the brutal attack by Kit and his men, Sycorax is left badly burned, broken, and totally dependent on Ariel. Ariel knows that "ev en her art can't save her, not now" (Warner, 1992: 159). Sycorax has taught her art to Ariel, who is able to save not only her mother but also some of Kit's wounded men through her careful application of various plant-based compotes. Motivated by lust and Ariel's knowledge of the land, Kit holds her and her dying mother hostage. Kit hopes that Ariel will "teach [them] the secrets of the isle —decipher its noises for [them]" (Warner, 1992: 141). During her captivity, Ariel becomes sexually involved with Kit, resulting in a pregnancy. She also learns some English from her constant contact with the colonizers (Warner, 1992: 163). As Ariel cooperates with Kit, Sycorax grows bitter and curses Ariel "and any offspring she might bear all the evils she could call down upon them" (Warner, 1992: 170). In this regard, Warner's Ariel is also Sycorax's prisoner, mirroring Shakespeare's depiction of this relationship. Ariel also loses her voice as a result of her double imprisonment: "she choked on speech [...] Kit's language was bitter in her mouth [...] she had no more words, indeed it seemed to her she no longer owned a voice" (Warner, 1992: 173). Cheryl Glenn discusses the power of silence in her study

Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence (2004), in which she presents the often gendered role of silence. By viewing silence as a primarily feminine rhetorical device, Glenn discusses how it can be used to undermine political (male) authority. This presentation of silence applies nicely to the recovered experiences of Ariel and Sycorax. While they both lose their actual voices in the novel, readers hear their stories through Warner's strong narrative voice.

4. The Everard family and Sycorax's legacy

Tying together all of the "colored" sections of Warner's novel is Sycorax.⁵ While the novel claims that "Sycorax has no power," (Warner, 1992: 206) and critics, such as Julie Sanders (2001: 147), claim that "Warner often appears proactive in silencing—or, at least, holding in a kind of enforced silence—her reclaimed protagonist," she unites the interrelated stories by hearing them as they happen. Sycorax's fate—as a victim of the violence inherent in colonizing—haunts the lives of the contemporary heirs to Kit Everard's colonial legacy. Miranda Everard, the daughter of the colonial Kit's namesake, struggles to find her voice in a world that views her as different, "swarthy" (Warner, 1992: 232). Unlike Shakespeare's Miranda, Warner's is not the center of her father's universe, his "cherubin" (1.2.153). This kind of relationship exists between Xanthe and Ant. The novel makes clear that the stormy relationship between Miranda's parents—Kit and Astrid—leaves little room for Miranda; her place, or lack of place, appears in scenic terms: "behind, between, to one side, never with, the early child whose existence becomes a slash parting the halves of a couple, not a hyphen that links them together" (Warner, 1992: 36). Miranda survives "the tempests of her childhood," but struggles to find her place and her voice in the world (Warner, 1992: 36).

One of the constant struggles Miranda faces that links her to Sycorax is silence. Sycorax notes when Ariel ceases to speak during her imprisonment—to Kit and to her. Ariel "choked on speech, for nobody could return an answer [...] She no longer owned a voice, but only a hollow drum for a head on which others beat their summons" (Warner, 1992: 173). While Ariel loses the will to speak given the conditions of the scene, Miranda desperately tries "to fill the silence that she feared in others, to ward off the invisibility she feared in herself" in the twentieth century (Warner, 1992: 235). As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that much of Miranda's anxiety is rooted in her family's history. Two pivotal, interrelated events force Miranda to confront her family's legacy: her encounter with an actor and her trip to Sycorax's island.

As a young adult, Miranda makes her living as an artist—reversing Shakespeare's designation of Prospero-as-artist. On an assignment in the 1960s, Miranda encounters a politically active actor, George Felix. As she photographs the movie set, George angrily confronts her, demanding to know "who gave permission for this" (Warner, 1992: 254). He indicts Miranda as "some bitch exploiting [him]" (Warner, 1992: 255). Miranda tries to apologize by claiming she "didn't have a moment to ask," but George rejects her excuse by shouting, "Aha, whitey just didn't get a chance to ask. And isn't that just the

case with everything you gone and done over the centuries of black oppression?" (Warner, 1992: 255). Miranda accepts his anger "from her position of privilege" (Warner, 1992: 257). Critics such as Cakebread (1999) and Zabus (2002) are quick to point out George's connections to Caliban. In this early passage, he rails against Miranda as a representative of the establishment that oppresses him, much in the same vein that Shakespeare's Caliban curses. Shortly after this important encounter, Miranda meets her "sister-aunt" Goldie (née Xanthe) for cake. Xanthe/Goldie is technically Miranda's aunt, but a few years younger —Miranda's grandfather remarries after his first wife, Kit's mother, drowns. Xanthe invites Miranda to accompany her to *Enfant-Béate* for the 350th anniversary of their ancestor Kit Everard's arrival on the island. Miranda is immediately uncomfortable about the proposition, asking Xanthe, "should we go at all?" (Warner, 1992: 267). Xanthe references the importance of History "with a big *H*" and claims that "you can't make it happen or unhappen just as you please" (Warner, 1992: 267). Yet Miranda is "silenced as she contemplated her thoughts," thinking of George Felix and her sister-aunt's persuasive nature (Warner, 1992: 267).

As usual, Goldie gets what she wants, and Miranda and her father, Kit, accompany her to the anniversary celebration. This change in scene —from London to *Enfant-Béate*— forces Miranda's hand in confronting her family's past. As Goldie makes plans to build a hotel and casino on the island, Miranda attempts the difficult task of being a responsible artist. She encounters two native women on the island, selling bread and thinks that:

She would like to find a way of making an image of such women [...], which would be neither exotic-erotic like Ingres or Matisse odalisques, nor indignant-realist like Abolitionist propaganda, neither Noble Savage nor Heroic Victim, but would connect with their history all the same. (Warner, 1992: 306)

Miranda briefly thinks of photography, but realizes that "when [she] take[s] a photograph it still comes out with [her] stamp on it" (Warner, 1992: 307). While simultaneously evoking the earlier scene in which Miranda takes George's photograph without permission and Prospero's manipulative art in which he controls the island and all creatures on it, this passage shows Miranda trying to negotiate between her desires as an artist and the desires of her subjects in hopes of doing her work in a morally sound fashion. It also reflects Warner's own fear —expressed in "Between the Colonist and the Creole"— in which she discusses the integrity, or lack thereof, of claiming her Creole heritage after her family's involvement in the oppression of slaves from Africa and from the islands.

This uneasiness about revisiting the site of such crimes has a profound effect on the contemporary Everard family. Miranda's father, Kit, decides to stay with his half-sister, Xanthe, and her husband, Sy, to help operate the casino and hotel. Miranda removes herself from this scene, a sort of second act of colonization in which the natives' only option is to perform menial jobs for the benefit of wealthy Europeans and Americans. Much action happens on the island after Miranda's departure and return to London. Her father occupies a space removed: "'Nigger' Everard, they used to call him behind his

back at school back in Surrey half a century ago. But he was one of the *bakkra* to the villagers, all the same" (Warner, 1992: 345). It appears that Kit, with his Creole heritage, cannot escape the loneliness of his childhood, "not quite belonging, yet with nowhere else, to go" by the end of the novel (Warner, 1992: 65). Xanthe's fate is in the sea that she loved, drowning like her half-brother's mother years before her, with only Sycorax hearing her desperate cries. We learn that Xanthe "loved the sea" (327). Her drowning death certainly brings to mind Ophelia, but it also mirrors situations in other novels which borrow from *The Tempest* such as Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* (i.e., Titus' drowning) and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (i.e., Peace's drowning).

In many respects, Xanthe is Warner's rewriting of Shakespeare's Miranda. Xanthe is the product of Anthony (Ant) Everard's second marriage to a much younger woman, Gillian. Ant adores Xanthe and usually grants his daughter's every wish. During an important scene set in the 1960s, Xanthe becomes Miranda's "accomplice" in their mutual desire to stay in Paris. Miranda notes that the usually unflappable Ant, her grandfather:

Became brittle and porous when he was in contact with his daughter; Miranda could see that he reacted to Xanthe's silkiness as if she weren't a clear, sparkling water, but a fiery solvent that he, for all his well-preened feathers, could not resist. (Warner, 1992: 243)

Later in life, Xanthe further exerts her authority over her father by rejecting her given name and using her nickname, Goldie, echoing both the King Midas story Serafine tells the girls at the beginning of the novel and her charmed life. Xanthe regards her relationship with her father in hostile terms, suggesting that she has been "thwarted every step of the way" by Ant, specifically with regard to romantic relationships (Warner, 1992: 315). Xanthe recounts how her father has interfered in all of her romantic encounters, going so far to suggest, "Poppa would have liked to marry me himself if he could [...] Under lock and key, lock and key, in the tower forever" (Warner, 1992: 314).⁶ Ant's interference in Xanthe's relationships in some way mirrors Prospero's orchestration of Miranda's engagement to Ferdinand. While he feigns disapproval of the union, Prospero ultimately controls the outcome of the betrothal. In Warner's rewriting of this scenario, Xanthe marries Sy, a man Ant strongly dislikes, without her father's blessing. Xanthe notifies her father of the marriage via telegraph from *Enfant-Béate*, the setting of her nuptials, to London, suggesting the import of scene in this situation.

While many of the novel's characters think that "everything [she] touch[es] turns to gold," Xanthe has trouble expressing her love for others in the novel (Warner, 1992: 343). Upon Xanthe's birth, she receives a blessing and a curse. The blessing, from an aging family friend, is that she will possess "a special, vintage-label common sense" (Warner, 1992: 74). The curse is from Miranda's mother, Astrid: "Xanthe will never find a way to enjoy what she was given" (72). It is once she realizes that she truly loves Sy—the she "become[s] vulnerable to love"—that her fairytale life begins to unravel. This realization is primarily motivated by scenic conditions: the failed coup of island

militants on *Enfant-Béate*. As Xanthe drowns in the oyster beds, the narrator indicates that Sycorax hears her cries for help (Warner, 1992: 352).

As Xanthe drowns, Sycorax hears many competing stories, but two tales dominate: the drowning of Xanthe and the rise of Atala Seacole. Both events occur because of an uprising, organized by a Caliban-figure, Iqbar Malik (né Jimmy Dunn). During and after the failed coup attempt, Sycorax hears the voices of these very different women: “the resolve of Xanthe Everard was heard by the old woman, but it wasn’t that cry that entered and rattled the old woman’s bones... The cry that shook her into consciousness came later” (Warner, 1992: 352). The voice that is able to reach Sycorax belongs to Atala, an English-educated islander who despises the exploitation of her homeland for profit. As Atala voices her concerns about the ways in which the whites have exploited the island and its people, she urges her followers that:

our children must not become a class of servants once again to the bakkra, the white bakkra [...] Like my grandmother, who went to England as a servant, following that family where her grandmother before her and others before that had all been slaves. (Warner, 1992: 355)

Atala’s powerful rhetoric serves at least two functions in the world of the novel. First, her speech gives Sycorax hope that “everything that happened all those years ago will be accomplished” (Warner, 1992: 356). Atala’s speech also reminds readers of how commonplace the practice she mentions of leaving one’s home to serve is for the islanders. Of particular importance, it reminds readers of Serafine’s situation, in which she too left a daughter on the island to work for the Everard’s in England. While it would be convenient and perhaps satisfying to claim that Atala is possibly Serafine’s grandchild, Warner’s complex treatment of colonialism’s legacy in the novel resists that kind of tidy fairytale closure. Rather, Warner proliferates this scenario in order to show the scope of this practice, of losing one’s family in order to survive in a postcolonial world.

5. Conclusion: coming full circle

Family is at the heart of the novel’s end as loose ends come together. After Xanthe’s untimely death and Atala’s reordering of the island (which recovers its original name of *Liamuiga*), Miranda remains in London, working as an artist. She is reunited with George Felix, who has now taken the name Shaka Ifetabe, after donating one of her images to a charity that supports famine relief and health education in South Africa. The scene of their reunion takes place at a church converted into a theater space; Shaka is rehearsing when Miranda arrives. The play is Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*; Shaka plays Caliban and recites the “You taught me language” speech when Miranda enters. Miranda immediately thinks, “Oh God, how, I’d like to learn me a new language. Beyond cursing, beyond ranting” (Warner, 1992: 368). As she tries to deny her feelings for Shaka, she reminds herself that “she wasn’t living inside one of Shakespeare’s sweet-tempered comedies, nor in one of his late plays with their magical

reconciliations, their truces and appeasements and surcease of pain” (Warner, 1992: 370). It becomes clear that the two share a special bond and that a romantic relationship will develop. Shaka reflects on the importance of names, telling Miranda:

What a beautiful name, and it suits you. I changed mine in the high times, when Africa and roots were the answer —finding the lost Fatherland— and George was whitey's name for us —‘Happy George,’ always a-laughin’ and a-smilin’, God’s li’l chilun. So now...I’ve ended up with no name. I am the Unnameable, ha-ha, which is why I know how to play Caliban, of course. (Warner, 1992: 373)

While Shaka claims he has no name, he does have a voice, and a strong one, in the novel. This exchange between the two ends with “they had begun play,” suggesting the game of chess in Shakespeare’s play but moving beyond a mere game into something deeper, an exchange that will find them “engaging with each other so raptly that for a time they would never even notice anyone else outside looking in on the work they were absorbed in, crossing the lines, crossing the squares, far out on the board in the other’s sea” (Warner, 1992: 373).

The relationship between Miranda and Shaka produces a baby they name Serafine. The ending of the novel is therefore hopeful, a sort of reconciliation between Shakespeare’s Miranda and Caliban, and many critics such as Zabus view this happy ending through Warner’s scholarly work on fairytales. While the ending is happy, I find the fairytale reading to be reductive, since the novel does not close with Miranda and Shaka, happily ever after. Instead, the novel reflects Warner’s claim that “the book is about survival through language” (1993: 203) and Eileen Williams-Wanquet’s assertion that “the future does not lie in forgetting but in overcoming the past, using it as a lesson to build a better future” (2005: 277). With Serafine receiving the last line of dialogue as she visits Astrid and Sycorax in the last paragraph of narration, the novel emphasizes the importance of having a voice and of fostering a scene that encourages more than cursing.

Notes

1. From Foucault’s “What Is an Author?” (1980).
2. Many stage performances cast Ariel as female. For example, one such casting is present in Iris Murdoch’s *The Sea, the Sea*, an important production for that novel’s narrator, Charles Arrowby.
3. The island’s name changes based on the powers-that-be. Liamuiga is the original name; Kit Everard changes it to Everhope (in the early 1600s), then Saint Thomas (dictated by James I), then *Enfant-Béate* (under French rule), and finally back to Liamuiga by the close of the novel.
4. Prospero refers to Sycorax as a “blue-eyed hag” (1.2.269).
5. Many critics such as Chantal Zabus note the importance of the way in which Warner names her chapters with colors.
6. Many references to Xanthe’s life echo Warner’s scholarly interest in fairytales.

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