

# Remapping, Subversion, and Witnessing: On the Postmodernist Parody and Discourse Deconstruction in Marina Warner's *Indigo*

**Li Wang**

Nanjing University, China

## *Abstract*

Among the many postmodern revisions of *The Tempest*, Warner's *Indigo* remains second to none. It rewrites and parodies *The Tempest* with its postmodern subversion and construction, aiming to bombard European logocentric hegemony under the context of the Western grand narrative and the suppression of colored women with its Christian patriarchal system. Based on the Shakespearean canon, *Indigo* pivots on the marginalized and neglected figures in the original play and gives them a spotlight on the stage by empowering them with voices so as to reverse, subvert, and reconstruct Western History, challenging the Western hegemonic discourses of its patriarchal and colonial systems. Its success lies not only in the scrutiny of the past history under the perspective of postcolonial and postfeminist theories, but also in its author's identity as a white British woman and descendant of early settlers in the Caribbean, which leaves her with a peculiar stance to form a dialogue with Shakespeare and scrutinize history. Through depicting the anxiety of personal identity within the family, *Indigo* showcases the diversity and hybridity of the postcolonial legacy in the Caribbean. It bears witness to the cruelty of colonization and carries on its legacy through nonlinear narratives spanning more than three centuries, through which we can get a glimpse of Warner's ambition in healing the scars of past colonization and critically disclosing the darkness of it. This paper aims to better our understanding of the essence of this postmodern novel through the lenses of parody and deconstruction.

**Keywords:** *Indigo, subversion, parody, deconstruction*

## **Introduction**

William Shakespeare is indeed a genius not of an age but of all time, as his contemporary

Ben Johnson once praised, and probably also of all places nowadays. All the 38 plays in his oeuvre get their energetic life through countless literary rewritings and adaptations, with *The Tempest* (1611) being one of the most frequently rewritten texts. Though deemed as one of the late plays, it came first in the First Folio of Shakespeare in 1623. Another potent example of its prominence can be seen from the fact that the famous lines “Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises” (Shakespeare, 3.2.133), remarked by Caliban, were chanted at the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games. Moreover, its interpretation also seems open to discussion when it comes to the genre, meaning, and connotations. Besides centuries of criticism, the numerous rewritings show its everlasting charm, popularity, and ambiguity. For instance, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1973) by Kamau Brathwaite, David Dabydeen’s *Slave Song* (1984) and *Coolie Odyssey* (1988), and Philip Osment’s *This Island’s Mine* (1989) are just a few of its many revisions<sup>1</sup>, not to mention its numerous film adaptations. Interesting enough, Shakespeare himself is an expert in rewriting others’ plays, such as his *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, though of course not without an originality which distinguishes him from his peers and predecessors. It is not difficult to understand when we take the Elizabethan literary tradition of rewriting into account. In addition, in Said’s “On Originality”, he holds that what many great writers are interested in is not writing originally but more in rewriting (p. 135) and therefore with the interplay between the originality and repetition. What both the critics and the writers seek is actually “writing in writing” (p. 132). Roland Barthes also radically claims the death of author in the postmodern era and remarks that “any text is an intertext” (p. 39). He also regards reading as a kind of creative writing since the readers fill the original with their own interpretative inscription. Without exception, John Barth gives his own concern about the future of literature in his famous essay “The Literature of Replenishment”; however, he still believes in a hopeful future for literature since he argues that it is not language or literature that is “exhausted” but the “aesthetic of high modernism” (p. 71). For Julia Kristeva, “intertextuality” means the “permutation of [other] texts” (p. 36) and according to Linda Hutcheon, parody is a fundamental and perfect pattern used in postmodern novels in which intertextuality connotes a lot. In a postmodern rewriting, “a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer’s, director’s, or performer’s decision to reinterpret a source text” (Sanders, p. 2). It is easier to grasp that the postmodernist spirit stirring in the text, or the “metafiction”, termed by Patricia Waugh, renders it successful in the parody of the former canon. Waugh argues that postmodernist fiction employs intertextuality only as a strategy to blur the distinction between the outside “fact”, and inside “fiction” through which the “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (p. 2). Thus, as Malcolm Bradbury points out, the peculiar characteristic of “factionality” (p. 344), namely the combination of fact and

fiction shown in *Indigo*, can best sum up the zeitgeist and impetus of the contemporary novels.

Among the many revisions of *The Tempest*, Warner's *Indigo* (1992) remains second to none, and it is a novel of "factionality" that connects the "then" and "now" in the labyrinth of narratives. Through the postmodern appropriation and dialogue within and without the text, it rewrites and parodies *The Tempest* with both subversion and construction, aimed at bombarding the European logocentric hegemony under the context of the Western grand narrative and its suppression of colored women under the Christian patriarchal system. Based on the Shakespearean canon, *Indigo* pivots on the marginalized and almost neglected figures in the original text and gives them a spotlight on the stage by empowering them with voices so as to reverse, subvert, and reconstruct the Eurocentric Western version of history, namely, the "metanarratives" as coined by Jean-Francois Lyotard. Promoting "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, p. 23). *Indigo* doubts and challenges as well the patriarchal and colonial discourses. Its success lies not only in its scrutiny of the past under the perspective of postcolonialism and postfeminism, but also in its author's identity as a white British woman and descendant of early settlers in the Caribbean. This altogether renders her stance a peculiar one, both within and without, in forming a dialogue with Shakespeare and scrutinizing the writing of history. In addition, through depicting the anxiety of postmodern and personal identity within the Everards family, *Indigo* showcases the multifarious diversity, otherness, and hybridity of the postcolonial legacy in Caribbean cultures. Its bearing witness to the cruelty of colonization and continuity of its legacy lie in the nonlinear parallel narratives of poetics across more than three centuries, through which we can get a glimpse of Warner's ambition in healing the scars of past colonization and disclosing critically the dark side within it. This paper aims at bettering our understanding of the essence of *Indigo* through the theory of postmodern rewriting, especially parody, and deconstruction of Michel Foucault's discourses of power and Jacques Derrida's theories of deconstruction. Hence, the following three parts are from the perspectives of postcolonial, postfeminist, and postmodern narratives, respectively.

## **1. Postcolonial Writing by Remapping the Prospero-Caliban Encounters**

After searching the names of the afore-mentioned rewritings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, we can easily find that the revisions generally come after the 1960s and pose a reversed stance when compared with the original text, especially from the postcolonial perspective. This is not without profound reason, since the 1960s was an important demarcating watershed during which the colonies in both Africa and the Caribbean got their respective national independence. Also, the "swinging" Sixties<sup>2</sup> (Bradbury, p. 340) came with the postmodern turn in which people held the view that everyone's voice, including the marginalized ones', needs to be heard. Hence the flourishing of rewritings of Shakespeare's ambivalent play. In line with the spectre of Derrida's deconstruction in

the early 1960s, a lot of rewritings appeared in the literary scene with a deconstructionist spirit, challenging the absolute authority of canonical works. Before Warner's *Indigo*, those trail-blazing and pioneering works include Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986). The former deals with the reconstructing of the archetypal Bertha Mason figure in *Jane Eyre* and the latter parodies Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Both revolve around the thematic concerns of colonization and reconstruction of the formerly marginalized characters, and *Indigo* is no exception.

Born in London of an English father and Italian mother, Warner also writes under the "anxiety of influence", as coined by Harold Bloom, of Shakespeare, the great canon maker. Her rewriting of Shakespeare showcases her paying homage to the literary giant, and her ambition as a postmodern English female writer, by using her writerly talent in weaving the unique mythical stories in *Indigo*. Like her literary precursor, Warner shows great enthusiasm towards language, myths, and fairy tales. The dual plots in *Indigo*, like that of so many Shakespearean plays, thread together the facts of colonization in the formerly colonized isles of the seventeenth-century Elizabethan era, and its lingering effects on the lives of three consecutive generations in the Everards family, both in post-war London and in the 1980s. The novel begins with the fairy tales of Serafine, the black nanny in the Everard family, and their real life entangled with family chaos in London in 1948, and ends with the namesake Miranda of Creole parents marrying George Felix/Shaka<sup>3</sup>, a black actor and postmodern Caliban figure who gives birth to their baby in the 1980s. The dual narratives converge when the 350th anniversary is held on the isles and Miranda and her sister-aunt Xanthe, a golden doll version of Miranda, voyage back to the islands. With the light of postcolonialism, "the deprivileging of Prospero" is contrasted sharply with "the rise of Caliban" (p. 2), as pointed out by Chantal Zabus. Obviously, the deformed Caliban, much like Friday in Defoe's novel, is purposefully demonized and dehumanized. Therefore, Warner in her rewriting challenges the stereotypes of deformed Caliban and his natives alike; hence, the colonial encounters between the white and indigenous peoples come to the foreground.

The first narrative is based on the process of colonization on the benighted yet exotic island. I would argue Warner unearths the carnage and cruelty involved in the colonial encounters of the seventeenth century in this part. Her main reversing methods are showed in at least three ways, namely by depicting the cunning tricks of the colonizers and their absolute authority in knowledge via naming and renaming, revealing the Western hegemonic and patriarchal superiority through Biblical allusion, and reconstructing the formerly demonized natives by adding supplementary details of their origins.

Set in the seventeenth century, these stories revolve around the life of Sycorax, the "blue-eyed hag" in *The Tempest*, her adopted son Dulé with "a West African survivor of Igbo origin" (Warner, p. 149), and her adopted daughter Ariel on the island Liamuiga, which "is full of noises" (Shakespeare, 3.2.133). Instead of an uninhabited island, as in

the eyes of Western settlers, Liamuiga is peopled with natives and has its own tempo of life. In 1618, Christopher Everard Kit and his companions land on this archipelago and begin their exploitation and appropriation of the so-called "original garden God forgot to close" (p. 180). They later claim the islands by renaming them after Christian names, such as Grand-Thom' and Petit-Thom'. Naming is a very important way of showing authority since it usually concerns exercising sovereignty in claiming possession, as is hinted in the name "the fair newfoundland of Everhope" (p. 153). Liamuiga and the nearby islands in the archipelago then undergo centuries of colonization under different names according to their colonizers' nationalities. It is not until the 1960s that they reclaim their original names with national independence.

Ironically, the Westerners who were at first deemed as guests and travelling explorers on the islands later become the rulers of this land by enslaving the natives. For instance, after the first fierce encounter between the natives and Europeans along the coast, they reach a common ground that the whites can live on this island for "seven months" (p. 159) because their gun powder outwits the spears and other backward weapons of the natives led by Dulé. However, even the seven-month treaty expires soon due to the vanity and greediness of the colonizers, since they find their lucrative profit in making indigo dye from the indigo bush and planting other crops like cotton and tobacco (p. 152). In the following fifteen years, they enslave the native labors and exploit their land by clearing the formerly dense forests. The chieftain of Liamuiga, Tiguary, also Sycorax's brother, shows great concern with his people when they "watched their planting and their forest clearance with mounting apprehension" (p. 163). Similarly, Dulé and the indigenous islanders of another island, Oualie, "grew more anxious at the bustle of the settlement [and] its expansion" (p. 178). Finally, they form an uprising against the outsiders; however, it ends in a great debacle and they lose their rights as owners forever. The novel depicts vividly this tragic encounter, with much more fierceness and a higher mortality rate among the natives than their first encounter, for "the firepower battered them, their eyes red and swollen from smoke and weariness and the horror of the mutilations and deaths among their companions" (p. 198). It is under such dire conditions that Dulé and Tiguary lose their battle and sovereignty over the islands, and the cunning tricks of the colonists are thus portrayed and showcased. From that time on, those islands become permanent colonies under the authority of the Europeans. They rename this island and that at will, enslave the local people and abuse the native females, symbolized in Ariel, by reducing them to sexual animals without affection and disowning their relationship with their mixed-race offspring, like the mulatto Roukoubé, son of Ariel and Everard Kit. It is from this time on that "the isle is full of noises" (Warner, p. 213).

Violence is often done via (re)naming. In addition to the islands, the renaming is also directed towards the natives, as embodied in Kit Everard's teaching English to Ariel, his "Amazon Princess" (p. 180), or in other words, his black mistress. This parodies Prospero's giving Caliban the gift of wine, the "Water with berries in't", and teaching him

language such as naming “the bigger light” the sun, “the less” one the moon, and other names for other fauna and flora on the island (Shakespeare, 1.2.332-344). In a Foucaultian reading, language or knowledge is adopted by Everard Kit and the exploiters as a tool of colonization and Christianization. They in return yoke the heavy chains of bondage on the natives with their western authoritative knowledge. The knowledge or the magic power from the Great Book of the patriarch colonizer Prospero, here in *Indigo*, obviously alludes to the Christian Holy Bible, through which the white man can be seen to be playing the role of God in their colonial projects.

Biblical allusions are therefore prevalent during the colonial encounters in the contact zones. For instance, Everard Kit compared the islands to God’s chosen garden for its “sunshine by day, sweet dew by night, the soft wind” on the first landing. By saying “these natives chafe me. I want their happiness, I seek their salvation, and I see I can’t convince them, and I don’t care for it” (p. 180), Kit unequivocally assumes the role of God, or at least the role of Jesus Christ who comes to the rescue of those natives in their backwaters, without their understanding and thanks. Another example is the first encounter, since it depicts a world of fire and flames with the help of the Western cannons and gunfire, and their alarming, loud reports. The saman tree in which Sycorax dwells is destroyed by flames. The fragile old black woman Sycorax is contrasted sharply with the energetic and powerful masculine Western men all armed with gun powder. In addition, the amorous affair between Ariel, the slave girl, and Everard Kit, the white master, represents the patriarchal suppression and colonial exploitation which is embedded in the gender politics of the novel. In the protest against the whites after 15 years of exploitation, Warner depicts the battlefield scenery vividly,

The sky was beginning to lighten to the east, streaks of day, as bright as magnesium *flares at the meeting point of sea and air*, set a fresh breeze stirring and whipped up a rhythm on the water’s surface. The *sea’s turbulence* increased; the noise of the cannons’ fire was terrible, unknown, the men *felt panic* rise inside them, yet *the fear* lashed them into frenzy of battle—then another canoe tipped up, and another... (p. 192; my italics)

Interestingly, the image of God prevails in several encounters between the indigenous and white characters. The flaming bush, the turbulent sea, the fear, the column of smoke, and the iterated images of fires and clouds remind readers of “the pillars of fire and clouds” and the omnipotent presence of God in the Holy Bible, especially in Exodus where God guides Moses to lead his people, the Israelites, out of prison and bondage in Egypt. In those episodes, God was said to have appeared and looked down from the pillar of clouds by day and the pillar of fires at night.

What we also must bear in mind is that it is God the Almighty who creates as well as gives names to things in Genesis. There is light when God says “let there be light”. Through teaching Ariel English, the Prospero figure Kit establishes his almighty prominence like God. As Caliban discloses to Miranda in the original play, “You taught me *language*,

and my profit on't/ Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me *your language!*" (1.2.362-364; my italics) This makes Caliban a round character and renders him a much-heated interpretation in the postcolonial perspective. No wonder some critics and readers claim that they can imagine *The Tempest* without Ferdinand, but not without Caliban. In the colonial "then", Warner's revisions of providing background details to Caliban, Sycorax, the formerly asexual Ariel, and the unnamed islands are also noteworthy.

The indigo dye maker Sycorax, who is absent once for all and conveniently referred to as the dead witch by Shakespeare at the very beginning of his play, gets new life under Warner's pen. Sycorax is occasionally mentioned by her son Caliban and Prospero as the ugly sorcerer in *The Tempest*. However, Warner minutely depicts what Sycorax's life is like and how and why she is made a witch, discarded by both her husband and her tribe, and is gradually reduced to the doubly suppressed "second sex", in Simone de Beauvoir's sense. The Elizabethan Caliban figure Dulé, whom Sycorax rescued by cutting the belly of a drowned slave after a shipwreck, parallels the leaking episode at the very beginning in the play. Ariel's origin of "Arawak bearing and colouring" (p. 115) is also displayed in a similar vein. Besides those supplements, the positive figures of the natives are delineated. For instance, faced with Ariel's betrayal of her tribe, Sycorax educates her by remarking that "we were noble, my people. We carried our heads high" (p. 165). Other salient examples can be seen from Ariel's healing the poisonous wounds of the whites after her captivity, regardless of her own broken legs, and Dulé's sense of justice that he should kill Everard Kit easily in his sound sleep, though he doesn't. As to Dulé, "to attack in self-defence...was a warrior's response, justified in the heart of the battle. But to dispatch a victim in the dark, while he was sleeping, was not a method of attack or survival" (p. 155).

Thus through the reconstruction of the colonized, Warner remaps the colonial encounters, with Europeans represented by Christopher Everard Kit, the collective Prospero figure, and the colonized represented by Dulé. In *Indigo*, Caliban "curses back" (Zabus, p. 115) which embodied well in the uprisings led by Dulé, and numerous protests in the postcolonial, 1960s Caribbean. It is through Calibans' cursing back that Warner successfully writes against the grand narrative of history and proclaims the colonial fact that the fair is actually foul, and foul fair. Simply put, history and truth, more often than not, are not simply what we can now glean from the textbooks endorsed by the authoritative party.

## **2. Postfeminist Revision and Subversion in Rewriting the Patriarchal Discourses**

The debasement and disparagement of the othered males represented by Caliban has been explored. In a similar vein, the deliberate absence of and unknown fear towards the females are also obtrusive in the original play, such as the motherless Miranda, the feminine Ferdinand in exile, and the demonized and racialized otherness of the witch

Sycorax. The patriarchal chaos caused by Prospero's magic cannot be divorced from its marriage with imperialist and patriarchal repression. The reconstructing of Caliban (Sy and Shaka) in *Indigo* undoubtedly represents the colonized, in the postmodern era with their independence. If the inversed depiction of the colonizer and the colonized (represented by the feminized Kit and the nationalist Caliban) is not uncommon in postmodern rewritings, then the reconstruction of females in *The Tempest* must be Warner's peculiarity because she not only reconstructs the doubly oppressed native females but also the virtuous Miranda by rendering her a hybrid identity. Thinking in Derrida's definition of "differance", we can be sure Warner's rewriting is both the "addition" and "the dangerous supplement" to the original play.

Compared with the negative depiction of Caliban, the total absence of the old witch Sycorax, the formless and androgynous Ariel, as well as the motherless Miranda in *The Tempest* makes them seem much neglected and reduced to flat characters. Hence the postfeminist urgency to represent them. By rewriting, Warner expands and enriches those marginalized females by letting "the subaltern" speak. Through the reconstruction of Sycorax/Ariel, Serafine, and Miranda, Warner challenges and subverts the patriarchal discourses.

Sycorax/Ariel is the first type of female that has been deprived both of presence and body in the play, while being reconstructed in the novel. What we vaguely know about Sycorax in the play is that she is Caliban's dead mother, and was a witch with blue eyes. In Warner's version, she explains Sycorax's blue eyes by pointing out that her trade is making indigo dye:

Over a decade of dyeing, the indigo stained Sycorax blue; she couldn't wash it from the palms of her hands any more, not from the cuticles and beds of her nails. A blueish bloom lay on her dark skin, blue-black as a damson when it's picked and fingers leave shiny marks on the maroon-purple skin underneath. Her tongue, too, was blue, from tasting the grain of the indigo after she had grounded it... It was easy to mistake her grey eyes for blue as well, for the whites were the colour of the noonday sky... (pp. 90-91)

In addition, Sycorax is the incarnation of the Great Mother, since she is the adopted mother of Dulé and Ariel, besides her own children. She is by nature a loving mother and caring wife; however, she is gradually made into a witch by her tribesmen and discarded by her husband due to her interest in wilderness. Actually, "she had grown into her role as wisewoman and witch, and come to accept the powers others attributed to her, and agree that she might be the special source and cause" (p. 145). Simply put, Sycorax is not born but made a witch. After assuming this identity, she gradually comes to rule over the island's flora and fauna and is reported to have miraculous powers while making indigo. After the coming of age of Dulé and Ariel, they both leave her due to her suffocating love, leaving her alone in old age and with no heir or heiress to whom she can pass on her skills. With so many details, a well-rounded character comes to our vision. As to the



connotation of the color blue, Warner asserts,

The colour blue, the colour of ambiguous depth, of the heavens and of the abyss at once, encodes the frightening character of Bluebeard, his house and his deeds, as surely as gold and white clothes the angels...blue is the colour of *the shadow side*, the tint of the marvellous and the inexplicable, of desire, of knowledge, of the blueprint, the blue movie, of blue talk, of raw meat and rare steak (*un steak bleu*, in French), *of melancholy*, the rare and the unexpected. (*From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 243, my italics)

Multifarious as the color may denote, it obviously carries the meaning of sorrow and melancholy from the perspective of Sycorax. Warner also connects her with time in the shadow island under exploitation by writing “time was no other colour but blue” (p. 147), hinting at colonization. Through all these revisions, Warner expands and changes “the blue-eyed hag” into a loving and sorrowful old mother who draws our due sympathy.

Like mother, like daughter. Ariel shares Sycorax's maternal experiences as a result of her affair with Everard Kit and the mulatto child that comes out of that affair. Ariel in the play is a symbol of messenger between Prospero and the shipwrecked ones. In the novel, she also attempts to connect the natives and Everard Kit. However, after her captivity and Kit's indifference, even disowning their child, Ariel comes to realize there is an unbridgeable gap between the two peoples. She ends up helping her half-brother Dulé in protesting against the whites. Through Ariel, we see the ingrained prejudice and hatred the white colonizers imposed on the othered and marginalized women. Kit never thought of Ariel as an ordinary woman like her white counterparts. His guilt at committing the forbidden sin with the non-white woman before the grace of God, and his ingrained fear towards Ariel and her alike, make him believe that Ariel “might not have a heart” and is “made of obsidian” (p. 186), which is exemplified minutely in the excuses he finds for himself: “she and the other natives of these isles lived at a time before sin...a happy time, but inferior in intelligence and humanity to enlightened ideals of my kind” (ibid.). Ariel's true affections towards Kit are considered racial, cunning tricks, and are contrasted sharply with the cruelty and coldness of Everard Kit. The deprivation of Ariel's genuine feelings and the Others' humanity and intelligence parallels very much Marlow's retelling the story of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which showcases the sense of superiority the white European colonizers often hold towards colonized people. Only by reducing them to the status of inhuman or subaltern beings and heathen souls, can they play legally and appropriately the role of God, as mentioned before, while carrying on their civilizing projects.

In certain ways, Serafine, the black nanny in *Indigo*, bears much resemblance to Ariel. When it comes to the relationship between Serafine and the grandfather, it is hinted that she enjoys a special status in the Everards and shares an intimacy with the grandfather Anthony, and even the hostess envies her. The importance of Serafine also lies in her

maternal role of providing boundless love and the telling of fairy tales to Miranda and Xanthe, even including Kit's wife Astrid in the end. The mothers of both little girls are neglecting their maternal duty. Xanthe's mother is vain and only spoils her by throwing precious things to her. Astrid once even lost Miranda when shopping in the market. Their deficiency shows clearly the great mother figure incarnated in Serafine, which also points to her intimate connection with Sycorax in the colonial past. "Sycorax speaks in the noises that fall from the mouth of the wind" (p. 77), while Serafine articulates those fairy tales to the little girls. They are both deemed the sources of voices, in other words, empowered with the force of articulating silences from the past discourse. It is thus through the "community building" (Bonnici, p. 7) by Serafine the storyteller, that both Sycorax and Ariel in the seventeenth century, and Miranda and Xanthe, the new women in the twentieth century, echo each other, since they share a maternal life which is highly symbolized in the water images of bathing and of the mother-pearl-oyster matrix in the dual narratives.

Serafine's family name Killebree is adapted from the native colibri bird, which renders her the possible connector between the two parties. Also, the word Serafine sounds very much like that of "seraphim", the plural form of "seraph" in Hebrew, which denotes literally burning fire, and means metaphorically a celestial being or a six-winged angel of the Lord. The burning fire alludes to Sycorax's experiences while the latter portends the final salvation and hope of the Everard family, when we take her position as caretaker into account. At last, it is Serafine in her nineties who takes care of Astrid in hospital, and lives with Miranda by babysitting the new-born, eponymous baby. This baby, Miranda's daughter Serafine, is the only heiress of the Everards. Moreover, Serafine's oral narratives "pose a menace to the monolithic view of patriarchy both structurally and contentwise" (Bogosyan, p. 161) through their nature of "factionality" as well as intertextuality. Thus her "unifying function" (ibid., p. 340) in the great mother figure, the storyteller, and the spirit of the bird flying between time is depicted. Prospero engages in both patriarchal and colonial endeavor to control and manipulate others' memories, senses, and experiences to become the omniscient creator of the story he weaves. In *Indigo*, however, it is the old nanny that plays the figure of Prospero. Simply put, Serafine is Prospero's female double, who reverses the patriarchal mapping of the islands and the telling of others' stories with her charming personality. The matriarch figures of Serafine, both in the family and as the matriarchal leader of the isles, converge as well.

At the center of the postmodern narrative is Miranda and Xanthe, one being the namesake of Miranda, yet with a Creole background, the other the white version Miranda who is rebelling against her patriarchal father, yet with a bizarre and exotic name. Contrasted with the hybrid identity of Miranda, Xanthe, the pink baby born in the first part in the novel is also a double of Miranda, representing her desired subconscious id. Her brashness and confidence contrast with the concerns and struggles of Miranda. In fact, Xanthe's final death can be interpreted as the death of

envy and vanity in the new Miranda, who finally finds her identity and reconciles with the past. Miranda's father, the feminized Kit Everard, who bears the same name of their ancestor in the Elizabethan era, is the son of Anthony and a Creole woman. Likely, Miranda's mother Astrid is also a Creole who is despised by the stepmother, a white woman in her thirties and the second wife of Anthony. Baffled by their own identities, Miranda's parents often quarrel, leaving Miranda to the caretaking of Serafine and later to exile in Europe by herself. The life in turmoil deprives Miranda of a happy childhood. Inheriting the anxiety of identity from her father and lacking maternal love, Miranda grows up into an independent yet lonely woman swaying between her Creolisation and colonization. She is always sidled with a dual consciousness, in Fanon's sense, one of innocent childhood where her family's exploits were romanticized, and a growing female awareness of the falsity of that world in light of her expanding knowledge of colonialism and her family's wrongdoings in it.

Miranda is also written as "Mirando" in Italian, which means "bravery". If we do not forget the famous line of "brave new world" uttered by Miranda in Shakespeare's play, we know what Warner here implies in the hybrid Miranda, who marries George Felix/Shaka, a Caliban figure with African origin, and gives birth to Serafine, the fourth generation of the family who coincidentally carries the nanny's name. By the novel's end, Miranda's illusion has been shattered as she realizes even in "the real world of the end of the century, breakage and disconnect were the only possible outcome" (p. 391). The islanders still live in poverty and chaos, and they "never looked an English man or woman in the eye: for they had been taught over the centuries that meeting the masters' glance was dumb insolence" (p. 295). Sy, another Caliban who profits by running hotels for tourists, claims when Miranda and Xanthe first land on the island, that "nothing was achieved here, except the slave system...Nothing will be" (p. 304). It is the result of slavery that caused the chaos, not vice versa, as Miranda argues with her father and points out about the chaos in both her family and the history of the islands.

After the drowning of Xanthe, the isles are full of noise again, but this time with the teeming voices of the dying Xanthe, of the myth-figure Sycorax, and of the new matriarch leader of the isles, Atala Seacole, echoing one another and portending a better and more promising future with cultural diversity. It is through the prophecy of Sycorax—"everything that began all those years ago will be accomplished, and the noises of the isle will be still and I—I shall at last come to silence" (p. 376)—that we know the chaos or noise must come to an end, and that a future of people living in serenity and peace is just around the corner. People have no choice but to live bravely in a new world.

### **3. Postmodern Narratives in Bearing Witness to the History Betwixt Then and Now**

In addition to the rewriting of content, *Indigo* also experiments in stylistic forms with postmodern poetics. With the salient "repetition with difference" in parody, Warner not

only appropriates and expands the namesakes in the Shakespearean play but also weaves the nonlinear narratives by shuffling between the two distinct temporal places and combining the family saga with the colonization of the isles through double perspectives. Also, serving partly as a prelude to *The Tempest* in the way of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *Jane Eyre*, it provides material for the understanding of their namesakes in the original texts, such as Sycorax's background and Ariel's origin. All in all, the adaptation and the original are complementary rather than merely supplementary. Its originality also lies in the postmodern narrative, the construction and embrace of hybridity, its meaningful title, as well as the ending.

In the postmodern world, storytelling is very similar to writing history since "the past may give the present intelligible answers" (O'Hanlon & Washbrook, qtd. in Bogosyan, p. 340). Narrative is always a symbolic social act. Warner's intentions of writing as bearing witness to the history of colonization and the complex cultural hybridity of this Creolisation demonstrate her broad horizon and sophisticated thinking. What is shining in *Indigo* is its importance in political (postcolonial) remapping and its structure with postmodern poetics and ethical underpinnings. The intertextuality between the "hypotext" or "pre-text" version of *The Tempest* and the "hypertext", in Linda Hutcheon's sense, renders us, the contemporary readers, a rare chance to bear witness to the grand "History" so as to tell the small narratives of "his/her stories", unearthing the invisible fissure and silent absence buried underneath the past. Despite the dual narratives, the richness of this novel includes family letters, fairy tales, and multiple points of view. In all, the novel is splendid, teeming with smells, colours, spells, and magical powers.

*Indigo* is also a novel about personal transformation in line with the tradition of the Bildungsroman. The struggle for personal identity is entangled with national identity. Personal anxiety within the Everards is ubiquitous. Several family members have Creole background. "'Creole' itself is a slippery and liminal word which focuses on what one is not—European, Native American, African—rather than what one is" (Bogosyan, p. 21). The intercultural or "hybrid" in Homi Bhabha's sense best encapsulates the dynamics of this word. In the early history of Caribbean colonization, the Portuguese word Creole carries with it the concept of "becoming native" due to racial mixing, hence the term "Caribbean Creolisation", which generally refers to the cultural hybridity with its obviously imported foreignness.

Inheriting her father's hybridity, the mixed-race Miranda looks "blurred" (Warner, p. 26) in the family photograph, which comes with its metaphorical baggage and implication. She also becomes Caliban's absent mate through her relationship with Shaka, a black actor "marooned" (p. 394) in London, who suggestively plays the role of Caliban and recites his lines in a 1980s staging of *The Tempest*. However, it is only out of love and care for each other that Miranda and Shaka finally reunite, since they both get a shared acknowledgement of past wrongdoings along the years before and after their national independence. Irene Lara claims "the literacy of Sycorax speaks to a third space

beyond the oppositional cursing tongues of Caliban and Prospero. Here lies the prospect of healing internalized fear and loathing about feminine and racialized spirituality within ourselves and others” (p. 80). Symbolically, Miranda is living in the third space as the heir of Ariel in the seventeenth century layer of narrative, for she is the one to mediate between the islanders and the English when she goes to *Enfant-Beate* on the 350th anniversary of the first landing.

The title *Indigo* carries the name of a color and bears a close resemblance to the word “indigenous”. It originally means “a blue dye obtained from various plants” (“indigo” in *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 725), but actually refers to the trade of *Sycorax*, the making of the highly prized yet poisonous indigo dye. As we explored earlier regarding the meaning of blue from the point of view of *Sycorax*, here again, the author strengthens the melancholy and sorrow bitterness of the natives since the lucrative trade in which *Sycorax* is involved engenders the health of the natives. As to the several colors embedded in the content of *Indigo*, *Zabus* reads it as such: “This white, British response to *The Tempest* is neither post-colonial, nor completely post-modern, neither nationalist or internationalist or ‘universalist’; it is indigo/blue, lilac/pink, orange/red, gold/white, green/khaki, maroon/black, neither/nor” (p. 154). It also refers to the hybrid identity Miranda finally embraces. With cultural diversity, she transforms and realizes “the worthlessness of external appearance and the true nourishment of the spirit from within” (p. 287).

The ending of *Indigo* echoes with the reconciliation and equilibrium in the original play. The family chaos is unknotted through the loving letters from the family to Miranda. Like the personal transformation of Miranda, the isle under a new female ruler also undergoes a sea change, since the locals change the former hotels into schools and begin to realize the importance of protecting their natural resources, instead of just developing tourism. Despite the general pattern of the representation of deprived Prospero and the rising Caliban, Warner, with her double perspectives, also shows us her great concern for the potential threat of turning the postmodern Calibans into the former patriarch Prospero. The potential clashes of civilization embodied in the Flinders riots can show this. Interestingly, Kit’s epiphany comes after the racial riots and he determines to live where he was born in serenity hereafter.

The postmodern narrative is highly symbolized in its circular narration and the circle of life. Xanthe’s death is compensated by the birth of Miranda’s daughter. Through this connection, the two new-born babies, Xanthe and Serafine, reunite in one, at least symbolically. The whole novel ends with its circular narration and the continuity in the family line as well as in history, bearing witness to history and, more importantly, ushering in a better and brand new future for both Britain and the Isles.

## Conclusion

As Julie Sanders puts it, “[t]he history of Shakespearean revisions provides a cultural

barometer for the practice and politics of adaptation and appropriation” (p. 51) due to the subtleties and ambivalence of Shakespearean plays. Probably that’s why many consider *The Tempest* as the final compromise and reconciliation of the old playwright with the world. Both its greatness and multifarious interpretations lie in its very ambivalence. On the one hand, the revisions altogether contribute to the diversified interpretation of the canonical play. On the other, the unexhausted energy in *The Tempest* gives its later writers not only “anxiety of influence” but also inspiration and vigor, whether they be from the postcolonial, postfeminist or postmodern perspectives.

With the passage of time, Warner’s *Indigo*, with powerful imagination and originality, proves to be one of the successful revisions of *The Tempest* since it challenges “narrative singularity and unity in the name of multiplicity and disparity” (Hutcheon, p. 90). As a woman writer from the well-heeled middle class, Warner distinguishes herself from others from the third world since she “writes back” directly to her own heritage. The parody between *The Tempest* and *Indigo* serves to close the fissure and the absence of representing the colonized from the re-voyage through history. Its postcolonial inversion in bringing the marginal figures to the center, postfeminist subversion in articulating female silences as well as consciously bearing witness to the family and historical past are of vital importance. Imbued in deconstructionist zeitgeist and postmodern parody, *Indigo* subverts and reframes the Eurocentric and imperialist frameworks. Armed with parody and deconstruction, we find that the logocentric binaries such as white/black, civilized/barbarians, and fact/fiction are blurred, subverted, and expelled once and for all. It is in this sense that Warner acts as a cartographer who remaps “history” in the contact zone, ranging from the seventeenth century through to the decolonized 1980s.

Last but not least, retelling the old story doesn’t mean there is no creativity within the new one. Conversely, *Indigo*’s originality lies in its own way of enlightening us with new perspectives when looking back, and novel methods of putting new wine in old bottles, in which, to quote Angela Carter’s words, “the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (p. 69). Indeed, the colourful, exotic, and fragrant novel *Indigo* has been exploding since its debut, bringing forth sparking fires and energetic life as well to its source text, the Shakespearean canon, *The Tempest*.

## Notes

- 1 See more adaptations from around the world in Chantal Zabus’s *The Tempests After Shakespeare*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- 2 Similar terms during this period include such like “the swinging London”, “counter-culture”, “revolution of consciousness” and so on.
- 3 George, the Caribbean black in postmodern London, later in the novel changes his name so as to better inherit the colonial history and to make clear his national identity.

## References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Barth, J. (1980). The literature of replenishment. *The Atlantic*, (245), 65-71.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bogosyan, N. (2012). *Postfeminist discourse in Shakespeare's The Tempest and Warner's Indigo: Ambivalence, liminality and plurality*. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Bonnici, T. (2003). Sycorax and Serafine: Community building in Marina Warner's *Indigo* (1992). *Maringa*, 25(1), 1-15.
- Bradbury, M. (1993). *The modern British novel*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Carter, A. (1983). Notes from the front line. In M. Wandor (Ed.), *On gender and writing* (pp. 69-77). London: Pandora.
- Derrida, J. (1970). Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences. In R. Macksey & E. Donato (Eds.), *The languages of criticism and the sciences of man: The Structuralist controversy* (pp. 247-65). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Holy Bible*. Exodus (Chap. 12-14). King James Version Online. Retrieved from <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art* (Ed., L. S. Roudiez). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lara, I. (2007). Beyond Caliban's curses: The decolonial feminist literacy of Sycorax. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9(1), 80-98.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Said, E. W. (1983). On originality. In *The world, the text, and the critic* (pp. 126-139). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sanders, J. (2006). *Adaptation and appropriation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shakespeare, W. (1999). *The tempest* (1611) (Eds., V. M. Vaughan & A. T. Vaughan). London: The Arden Shakespeare.
- Spivak, G. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of literature* (pp. 271-313). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Warner, M. (1992). *Indigo or, Mapping the waters*. London: Vintage Books.
- Warner, M. (1999). *From the beast to the blonde: On fairy tales and their tellers*. New York: The Noonday Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Waugh, P. (1984). *Metafiction: The theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*. London and New York: Methuen.
- Zabus, C. (1994). Prospero's progeny curses back: Postcolonial, postmodern, and postpatriarchal rewritings of *The tempest*. In T. D'haen & H. Bertens (Eds.), *Liminal postmodernism: The postmodern, the (post-)colonial, and the (post-)feminist* (pp.115-38). Amsterdam and Atlanta:

Rodopi.

Zabus, C. (2002). *Tempests after Shakespeare*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

**(Copy editing: Curtis Harrison)**

**About the author**

Li Wang (lily@smail.nju.edu.cn) is a Ph.D. candidate of English Department at the School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University, Nanjing, China (210023), specializing in British and American Literature Studies.