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Postmodernizing the Salem Witchcraze: Maryse Condé's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem

by JANE MOSS

MORE THAN THREE CENTURIES after the last accused Salem witches were changed or pardoned, the witchcraft hysteria that gripped seventeenth-century New England society continues to fascinate us. For three centuries, historians have continued to document the facts and explain the phenomenon. Since the mid-nineteenth century novelists and playwrights have also interpreted the dramatic events and recently filmmakers have joined the hordes seeking to recreate and understand the social, political, and psychological climate of 1692. While some important American historians (including the eminent Harvard professor Perry Miller) downplay the Salem witchcraze as an aberrant episode in our history, the fact that so many scholars and writers continue to search for the deep meaning, the symbolism of the events, suggests that the Salem witch trials can be used as a kind of template for analyzing and critiquing American society. The recent film version of *The Crucible* has reminded us that Arthur Miller saw the McCarthy hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee as a 1950s version of the Salem witch trials. A broader indictment of U.S. society is made by Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé's 1986 novel, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*.

This new version of the Salem witch trials, written by a francophone Afro-Caribbean woman in the name of an anglophone Amerindian woman slave from Barbados, was originally published in France, but quickly translated into English. It has been enormously popular among U.S. feminists, multiculturalists, and francophone studies scholars because it fulfills the desire for a first-person narrative by a strong Third World woman and it startles us with its version of an episode in our history. As in the equally celebrated *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, the autobiography of a Guatemalan Indian woman deeply involved in the struggle for human rights, *I, Tituba* (and it seems evident that the wording of Condé's title is an echo of *I, Rigoberta Menchu*) lets us hear the life story of a woman of color, doubly oppressed by race and gender. It is a beautifully written novel in which the author seems to let her subject talk and create herself through her words. As she recounts her life, she tells us not only about her trials and tribulations, but also about her joys and her triumphs. In so doing, she constructs her own subjectivity. No longer a bit player in the Salem witch trials, she is a proud, sensual, nurturing, spiritual woman with great knowledge of folk healing.

Beyond creating a wonderful heroine, the novel raises a number of issues about History, race, and gender as well as underscoring the potential dangers of simplistic liberalism, feminism, and multiculturalism. It also raises the question Yale Puritan scholar Edmund Morgan asked in a review of *The Crucible* film (*New York Review of Books* Jan. 9, 1997), the question about how truthful a creative writer needs to be when writing about real people and facts. Let me try to summarize the main argument I want to make. My problem with the novel is that it ironically makes two competing claims: that it is redressing a wrong by writing Tituba into history and that it is an act of revenge and a mock epic, not a serious historical novel. The first claim, which we want to believe because it is ideologically satisfying, is false. The second claim, made by the author in interviews, is more credible but readers have tended to overlook it. When an author (or filmmaker) takes historical figures, events, and documents and invents a fiction around them, it creates an illusion of historicity, authenticity, and truth that can be very seductive. The reader receptive to the ideological messages encoded in the text, whether seriously or ironically, will suspend disbelief and not bother to verify the facts. Maryse Condé very cleverly manipulates her readers and critics, playing to their sympathies and predispositions.

For quite a while now, a coalition of interested parties has taken up the banner of New Historicism, arguing that the line between History and Literature is blurry since History is a narrative reconstruction of the past marked by the biases of the period in which it was written and by gaps in the record. Many recent novels have responded to this problematizing of History's objectivity and our ability to know the past by writing historical fiction very different from the popular form of the historical romance exemplified by *Ivanhoe*, *The Three Musketeers*, or *Gone with the Wind*. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon labels this new kind of historical literature "historiographic metafiction" which she says lays claim to historical personages and events at the same time it manifests a theoretical self-awareness of History and fiction as human constructs and questions historical discourse as a discourse of power (chs. 6-7). It has become a standard part of academic discourse to talk about the need to give a voice to the voiceless, to write about those powerless people forgotten by official History, to fill in the gaps and erasures by writing the stories of the losers and victims in that continuing power struggle we call History. Therefore, it seemed to me that the story of a slave woman caught up in the Salem witch trials would be a perfect example of how white, Christian patriarchal society exploits, oppresses, and suppresses women and people of color because of their sex, sexuality, and otherness.

I was not the only good feminist to hail the novel as a perfect example of how women writers challenge hegemonic discourse by unearthing lost heroines, subverting masculinist notions about the feminine, and valorizing women's knowledge. Like many others who share my politically correct, the-

oretically informed views, I fell into a very clever trap, seduced by both Tituba and Maryse Condé. I ignored obvious signs in the text itself and warnings by the author. I had, like others, seen the anachronisms in the text, the ludic intertextual references, the parodic exaggeration and irony. I had even read the interview in which Condé states that *I, Tituba* is not a historical novel, but rather just the opposite of an historical novel (Scarboro 199-200) which the reader should not take too seriously (212). But until I started to explore what American historians and writers had to say about Tituba, I was willing to ignore all the signs that *I, Tituba* is an ironic text, an example of historiographic metafiction.

Before turning to the historical record and the previous literary representations of Tituba, let me give you a summary of the life that Condé's Tituba narrates. She is conceived when Abena, her mother, a sixteen-year-old Ashanti woman sold into slavery by a rival tribe, is raped by an English sailor aboard the ship ironically named *Christ the King*, transporting her to Barbados. Her early years on a sugar cane plantation are fairly happy because her mother was given as a mate to Yao, another Ashanti slave on Davis Darnell's sugar plantation. The slave family is destroyed when Abena is hanged after fighting off Davis' rape attempt and the distraught Yao commits suicide by swallowing his tongue. Chased from the plantation, the seven-year-old Tituba is taken in by Mama Yaya, an old woman who teaches her traditional African herbal medicine and animist beliefs, initiating her into communication with the invisible world. After Mama Yaya's death, Tituba lives in a small cabin, never lonely because of the supernatural presence of her three guiding spirits—Abena, Yao, and Mama Yaya. One day, she meets a handsome slave named John Indian, son of one of the last Arawak (or native American) Indians and an African slave. Meeting John Indian changes Tituba's life: through him, she discovers the pleasures of sex but also the pain of slavery. In order to live with him, she voluntarily becomes a household servant to Susanna Endicott, the widow of a wealthy planter. Humiliated by the way she is treated by her new mistress, she gets revenge by using her supernatural powers to inflict a fatal illness on Endicott. But the dying white woman has her own revenge when she sells John Indian and Tituba to Mr. Samuel Parris who, having failed in his business dealings in Barbados, is headed for Boston hoping to start a new career as a minister. Forced to leave their warm and beautiful island home, John and Tituba find themselves in the inhospitable climate of Puritan Boston where the harshness of the society matches the chilly climate. Tituba finds solace in sex with John and in taking care of Mr. Parris' invalid wife Elizabeth, his young daughter Betsey, and his orphan niece Abigail Williams. Although John and Tituba have been forcefully christianized and married by Mr. Parris, they have also been repeatedly told that the color of their skin is Satan's mark upon them. After spending a miserable year in Boston, Mr. Parris accepts the position of minister in Salem village and the family moves.

At this point in Tituba's story, American readers pick up the familiar facts surrounding the Salem witchcraze. Tituba describes the people and quarrels of the town, the stories and fortunetelling activities with Betsey Parris, Abigail Williams and the circle of girls, the strange fits that eventually lead to accusations of witchcraft against Tituba and others. She tells us how she is questioned, tortured, arrested, and imprisoned. But wait, she has a surprise for us! While in prison, she shares a jail cell with a very pregnant Hester Prynne, the fictional character created by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*! Hester tries to convince her that life would be better in the feminist utopian society she hopes for in the future, but in the meantime Tituba had better save her life by giving the judges and ministers the confession they want to hear. Condé inserts the testimony of Tituba Indian's court confession as it was recorded by Ezekial Cheever on March 1, 1692. After the historical document (which can be found in the Essex County Archives according to a footnote), Tituba again picks up the narrative to tell us quickly how the witch hysteria spreads and claims so many victims while she is in jail. After Governor Phips puts an end to the trials and hangings, Tituba languishes in jail until purchased for the costs of her imprisonment by a Sephardic Jewish merchant named Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo. A physically deformed widower with a kind heart, Azevedo buys Tituba to take care of his nine children. She finds some peace and pleasure with her new owner and the empathy between these two scapegoats of intolerant Puritan society soon leads to a mutually consensual sexual relationship. The compassionate Tituba even consents to conjure up the spirit of Azevedo's dead wife to console him. But the relative comfort of life with her new owner ends abruptly when an anti-Semitic campaign escalates to the burning of Jewish houses and businesses in Boston. Devastated by the death of his young children in the fire that destroys his home, Azevedo frees Tituba and books her passage on a ship back to Barbados. During the voyage and once back home, Tituba finds that she has become famous as a witch, and that her legend has inflated her healing powers into an ability to control the forces of Nature and protect people against death. Having settled in with some maroons or runaway slaves in the hills, Tituba soon becomes involved in an abortive slave rebellion against the white planters. Betrayed by a treacherous maroon leader, she and her young companion are hanged to set an example for others who might wish to foment rebellion. After surviving so many ordeals, it is ironic that Tituba must die when she has finally regained her freedom in her native land and just when she was about to give birth to a child. But while hanging takes her life, it does not snuff out the spirit of Tituba which continues on in the slave communities of Barbados.

In writing her novel, Maryse Condé gives over her narrative to Tituba so that she can tell her own story, a story she claims has been ignored by the official history of the Salem witch trials. At several points in the text, Tituba repeats her complaint that she will be ignored and then forgotten. With astounding foresight (thanks to Condé), she says:

I felt that I would only be mentioned in passing in these Salem witchcraft trials about which so much would be written later, trials that would arouse the curiosity and pity of generations to come as the greatest testimony of a superstitious and barbaric age. There would be some mention here and there of "a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing 'hoodoo.'" There would be no mention of my age or my personality, I would be ignored. As early as the end of the seventeenth century, petitions would be circulated, judgments made, rehabilitating the victims, restoring their honor, and returning their property to their descendants. I would never be included! Tituba would be condemned forever! There would never, ever, be a careful, sensitive biography recreating my life and its suffering. (110; see also 149-50)

As readers, we are so moved by Tituba's plight that we are willing to believe her and we accept at face value the claim that Condé is filling in this gap in history. The problem is that the righteous indignation that we feel is betrayed by the evidence. The truth is that American historians and writers have not completely forgotten Tituba: she figures in all of the contemporary accounts and as early as 1700 in *New Wonders of the Invisible World*, Robert Calef's response to Cotton Mather's 1692 official version of the trials *Wonders of the Invisible World*, Tituba's ill treatment at the hands of the Reverend Samuel Parris is mentioned. Calef reports that Tituba's confession was the result of beatings by her master. From 1692 on, Tituba does indeed figure in the historical record and also seems to have captured the imagination of some of our most prominent writers. In an article published in the *New England Quarterly* in 1974, Chadwick Hansen traces Tituba's textual after-life, noting that she appears in all of the major New England and U.S. history books from the 18th century on and she plays a role in the dramatized versions *Giles Corey of the Salem Farms* (1868) written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Tituba's Children* (1950) by William Carlos Williams, and the most famous play on the subject, *The Crucible* (1953) by Arthur Miller. Furthermore, African-American writer Ann Petry devoted her 1964 novel, *Tituba of Salem Village*, to the slave woman, taking the liberty of imagining her youth in Barbados and her life after the witchcraze. Historian Elaine G. Breslaw's 1996 study, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem*, meticulously reconstructs her life from archival records in Barbados, England, Salem, and Boston. In short, Tituba is not the forgotten victim Condé makes her out to be.

But even more surprising, the real Tituba was not even Black! Chadwick Hansen's article chronicles the transformation of Tituba from Carib Indian to African slave, noting that all of the 17th- and 18th-century sources (Deodat Lawson, John Hale, Robert Calef) refer to her as an Indian Woman from the West Indies. In the 19th century, the first three editions of George Bancroft's *History of the United States* and Charles W. Upham's 1867 study, *Salem Witchcraft*, refer to Tituba as an Indian from New Spain. It is only beginning in 1868 with Longfellow's verse drama that Tituba's race begins to change. Longfellow presents her as the daughter of an Indian woman and "a man all black and fierce ... an Obi man [who] taught [her] magic." Tituba remains half-Indian and half-Black in Bancroft's revised history, followed by John Palfrey and even in Samuel Eliot Morison's 1936 study of the Puritans. 20th-century representations of Tituba often took on an ugly racist tone: John

Fiske, for example, calls Tituba “a hag” of low grade intelligence but expert “in palmistry, fortune-telling, magic, second-sight, and incantations” (159). The racial stereotyping is even more vicious in Marion L. Starkey’s 1949 *The Devil in Massachusetts* where Tituba is portrayed as “half-savage, half-Negro” with “slurred southern speech and tricky ways.” Starkey also embellishes Fiske’s claim by telling us that Tituba showed the Salem girls “tricks and spells, fragments of something like voodoo remembered from the Barbados” (9-11). In William Carlos Williams’ play, Tituba is initially called half-Carib and half-Negro, but later referred to as Black and assigned a degraded form of Southern Black speech. By the time we get to Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, Tituba is a “Negro slave” and deeply involved in voodoo rituals. Although Ann Petry’s novel depicts Tituba as an innocent victim, she never seems to doubt that she is Black. The transformation is complete from the historical Tituba—an Indian slave who probably learned something about fortunetelling from her Barbadian owner to Black slave and voodoo priestess.

Very recently, historians have begun to correct the shameful representations of Tituba. Bernard Rosenthal’s 1993 *Salem Story* sets the record straight, stating categorically that nothing in the records proves that Tituba told stories of witchcraft or voodoo (see ch. 1). Any suggestion of witchcraft practices comes from inconsistencies in the two versions of Tituba’s court testimony, but since the transcripts were recorded by her Puritan accusers (one, perhaps, by Samuel Parris), they cannot be considered reliable. Tituba denied being a witch when questioned by Robert Hale and historians generally assume that her confession was the result of beatings and the promise that she would escape the gallows. Rosenthal theorizes that because of her skin color (she is often referred to as “tawny”), she became the perfect Dark Eve, instigator of the witchcraze, perpetrator of the original sin that forced Puritans to recognize that their idyllic vision of a New World was flawed.

Elaine Breslaw’s 1996 monograph *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem* tries to explore the entire life of Tituba, as if responding to Condé’s character’s lament about her absence from recorded history. From her research on the Caribbean slave trade, Breslaw surmises that Tituba was probably an Arawak-Guiana Indian (not a Carib) born in the 1660s on the northern coast of South America, captured by English sailors in the 1670s, shipped and sold in Barbados before being purchased by Samuel Parris and brought to Boston in 1680 (12-22). Although there are variations in the spellings of the name—Tattuba in the 1676 records of Samuel Thompson’s plantation, Titibe/Titiba/Tittapa/Tituba in the Salem records—all probably derive from the name of the tribe since English slave traders often assigned names to captured Indians who considered it taboo to reveal their names to those outside the tribe. Breslaw insists that Tituba was an Arawak rather than a Carib Indian—the difference being important since the Caribs were a fierce, cannibalistic tribe while the Arawaks were a gentle people (14). Breslaw speculates that Tituba might have learned something about the belief system of her tribe—beliefs in

evil outside forces, omens, the ability to communicate with the dead—before being captured and brought to Barbados (18-19). It is also likely that once in Barbados, she would have lived with and been nurtured by an African slave family on a plantation, where she could have learned about African religious practices (43-49).

According to Breslaw, a teenage Tituba was probably sold in 1679 by her owner, the widow Pearsehouse, to Samuel Parris, then an unmarried, Harvard-educated young man in his twenties from a family of Barbados landowners (61). The following year, 1680, Parris took Tituba and another Amerindian slave (most likely John) to Boston where he quickly married and started a business and a family (75). Sometime during the eight or nine years they lived in Boston, John and Tituba were married. Parris moved his household, including his wife, three children (a boy and two girls), a niece, and his two Indian slaves to Salem village in July 1689. Based on Samuel Parris' will, probated in 1720, Breslaw speculates that the Indian slave named Violet mentioned in the inventory was a daughter born to John and Tituba perhaps in 1690 (86). In assessing Tituba's role in the witchcraft hysteria, Breslaw concludes that there is no evidence of Tituba's participation in witchcraft rituals prior to the first reports of the girls' strange behavior. Indeed, the evidence only establishes the facts that she aided Mary Sibley in preparing a witchcake to determine who was bewitching the girls and that she participated in the egg-white-in-water fortunetelling sessions (92, 97).

Breslaw claims that Samuel Parris accused Tituba of witchcraft to absolve himself of the guilt that others might attach to him for failure to maintain order in his household. Not wanting to punish his daughter Betty, he invoked the widely held belief that Indians were Devil worshippers (112). For her part, a beaten and frightened Tituba concocted her confession based on a confused mixture of Puritan, Amerindian, and Creole notions of witchcraft. That is to say that despite her acculturation, she did not understand the difference between Indian and Afro-Caribbean ideas about white, benign, healing witchcraft and Puritan notions of black, malevolent witchcraft (ch.6). After Governor Phips halted the trials and executions, Tituba recanted her confession according to Robert Calef, blaming Samuel Parris for forcing her to confess to diabolic activities (Breslaw 175-76). When the accused witches were freed, Samuel Parris refused to pay her jail costs and allowed her to be purchased for those fees (amounting to seven pounds) in April 1693. Historical records do not reveal the name of her new owner, nor any further details about Tituba's life. Breslaw ends her monograph by arguing that this Indian woman's role in the witch trials led to moderation within Massachusetts society, a trend that made possible the 18th-century Enlightenment (180). The argument is that once the New England establishment had to acknowledge that Tituba's confession was a fantasy based on a mixture of Amerindian folklore and English folk beliefs, they were forced to reject specters and magical practices from the realm of public discourse. According to this line of argumentation, Tituba's concocted confession and the claim to occult knowl-

edge become forms of passive resistance by which multiethnic West Indian and South American oral traditions subvert the elite institutions of colonial America (116-17, 179-80). This interpretation certainly gives Tituba the important role Condé thinks she deserves!

Writing thirty years before Breslaw, Afro-American novelist Ann Petry had at her disposal only the portrayal of Tituba popularized by historians and writers from the 1800s through the 1950s, so she had to invent a life for her before and after the events of 1692-93. Like Breslaw's historical monograph, Petry's historical novel also aims at rehabilitating Tituba and the tactic is to present her as an innocent victim, courageous in the face of adversity and steadfast in her denials of witchcraft (213, 223, 252). The big difference is that her Tituba is Black! Although Maryse Condé told interviewer Ann Armstrong Scarboro that she did not read Petry's novel until she was half done writing *I, Tituba* (200), there are too many borrowed fictional details to credit the claim and we must admit that she comes perilously close to plagiarism on this score. It can hardly be a coincidence that like Petry, Condé says that Tituba was owned by a widow named Susanna Endicott of Bridgetown who also owned John Indian. Condé also follows Petry's version in describing Parris as already married to a sickly wife before leaving Barbados aboard a ship ironically named in both novels, *The Blessing* (Petry ch.1/Condé I, 4, 6). Again, Condé repeats inaccurate details in calling the Parrises' daughter Betsey (in all of the historical records she is called Betty) and in eliminating their other two children. Condé also repeats the scene in Petry's book where Parris baptizes and marries John and Tituba aboard the ship taking them all to Boston (Petry ch. 1/Condé I, 5). Condé's descriptions of Boston as a cold, grey place whose Puritanical codes of behavior did not preclude the existence of taverns filled with sinful drunks is modeled on Petry's depiction of Boston as a frigid Babylon. Condé's mention of a public hanging clearly echoes Petry's account of the hanging of Witch Glover for having bewitched the Goodwin children (Petry ch. 2/ Condé I, 7). Condé's Tituba, like Petry's, meets a woman named Judah White who befriends her and teaches her about the curative powers of the herbs and roots they gather while walking in the woods beyond the city (Petry ch.3/Condé I, 7). Condé even borrows Petry's scene of the arrival in Salem Village where the Parrises are welcomed by Goodwife Mary Sibley who has started fires to warm the house and prepared them a dinner (perhaps this is the ur-housewarming party—Petry ch. 4/Condé I, 9). Condé's portrayal of John Indian as a handsome and charming man who liked to entertain and amuse others is true to Petry's characterization. Just as Petry's John repeatedly justifies his humiliating, submissive behavior by telling Tituba "Remember, always remember, a slave must survive" (12, 71, 90), so Condé's John repeats "The duty of a slave is to survive" (22, 92).

It is difficult to point to borrowings after the point of arrival in Salem Village since both novelists had at their disposal a wealth of material on which to draw. My conviction that Condé has used Petry's work for her own

purposes is, however, further confirmed by a comment that she makes in the "Historical Notes" at the end of her text where she writes:

According to Anne [sic] Petry, a black American novelist who also became passionately interested in our heroine, Tituba was bought by a weaver and spent the rest of her days in Boston.... I myself have given her an ending of my own choosing. (183)

This "ending of her own choosing" makes up one third of the novel and therefore must be of great importance to Condé. Now why would Condé borrow so many details from *Tituba of Salem Village* and then reject Petry's ending in favor of some fantastic and anachronistic events that strain the credibility of her text? This important question brings us back to the thorny issue of authorial intention. In other words, what is going on in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*? Why did she write the novel and what set of messages is Maryse Condé trying to convey? Another question we may well ask later is have her readers gotten the right messages?

There are many answers to these questions because, I believe, Condé had multiple motives. The most obvious explanation is that Condé was giving her readers the story they wanted to read just as Tituba gave her accusers the confession they wanted to hear. The author has told several interviewers (Vève Clark, Ann Armstrong Scarboro) that she wrote *I, Tituba* at the request of Mme. Gallimard (of the Gallimard publishing house) for a story about a woman from the Caribbean. Critics have pointed out that this puts Condé in the same position as entertaining storyteller vis-à-vis a white woman as Tituba vis-à-vis the Salem girls or Hester Prynne, who also asked for a story (Manzor-Coats 737). If the public wanted a tale about a Caribbean woman, she would give them all the images and stereotypes they expected. From the very first line of the novel, Condé gives us ample opportunity to decry the twin evils of slavery and sexual exploitation. When Tituba's mother Abena is raped by an English sailor aboard the ship named *Christ the King* we have a dramatic metaphor for the rape of Africa under colonialism, an act condoned and justified by Christian nations. Like all Afro-Caribbean women, others (including the reader) expect Tituba to sing, dance, tell folk stories, and practice magic. Like all Afro-Caribbean men, John Indian and the maroon leader Christopher are charming philanderers and self-serving cowards. Like all white planters, Davis Darnell sexually abuses his African slave women. Like all Puritans, Samuel Parris is a sexually repressed, pious sadist, obsessed with Satan. Like all Jews, Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo is a kindhearted, successful businessman persecuted by hateful Christians. And the list of self-consciously used clichés goes on.

This list makes it clear that one major motivating factor is revenge. Condé claims to have discovered Tituba while lost in the American colonial history stacks at the UCLA library and to have invented a life to revenge Tituba's treatment by historians (Scarboro 199). Condé's dismissive comments about Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* also suggest a desire to reverse literary portrayals of Tituba by white male writers (202). In a larger sense, she writes to

expose the discrimination and injustice she sees in American society, past and present. She says she added the Jewish character as a gesture to a Jewish woman historian who was her colleague at the time and tutored her on Puritan history and because she wanted to link anti-Semitism and racism (Scarboro 199-201). As she tells her interviewer, the experience of a slave woman caught up in the Salem witch trials offered “an opportunity to express [her] feelings about present-day America. [She] wanted to imply that in terms of narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, and racism, little has changed since the days of the Puritans” (Scarboro 203). In the novel’s “Epilogue,” Tituba calls America “A vast, cruel land where the spirits only beget evil!” (177).

Following Condé’s advice that we not take Tituba too seriously, we need to point out the ironic playfulness that also seems to motivate Condé, an aspect which numerous critics acknowledge but then choose to ignore. While some feminist critics want to see the jail house encounter between Tituba and Hester Prynne as a parody of contemporary Anglo-feminist liberal discourse—complete with lesbian separatist overtones, Lillian Manzor-Coats insists that we take it seriously “for it stages the typical power relations existing between white liberal feminists and women of color in contemporary Anglo society” (742). Carolyn Duffey agrees with Manzor-Coats and cites Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sara Suleri, two influential postcolonial feminist theorists, who criticize Western feminists for their patronizing, unthinking celebration of a composite Third World woman victimized by a universalized patriarchal oppression (Duffey 100). But if Condé is using Hester Prynne to send the message to Western women (her target audience) that sisterhood has its limits, she is also having some fun at the expense of the American literary canon. Of course the historical Tituba could never have met the fictional Hester whose imagined imprisonment took place five decades earlier. But perhaps we should pause for a moment to consider this intertextual encounter as a ludic, postmodern rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter* “avant la lettre” or before the fact, to play on the two French meanings of “lettre.” That is to say, when Condé tells us that the pregnant Hester committed suicide in jail (II, 4) she is killing off Hawthorne’s heroine at a point before his classic novel begins. Here is another act of revenge against the American intellectual establishment, a vengeance made sweeter by the fact that Nathaniel Hawthorne was a direct descendant of John Hathorne, one of the judges who presided over Tituba’s court testimony. By reappropriating Hester Prynne’s story, Condé is turning the tables both on feminists who claim Hester as a heroine and on Hawthorne who saw feminism as a threat (see Bercovitch). There are other flashes of playful, postmodern intertextuality in the text, including a reference to Cotton Mather’s *Wonders of the Invisible World*, incorrectly attributed to an English scientist named Dr. Fox (I, 4), an oblique allusion to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, a groundbreaking study of the psychology of colonized people (II, 2), and even an allusion to Charles Baudelaire’s poetic exoticism (I, 9).

Now we must again ask the question posed by Edmund Morgan: how

truthful does a creative writer need to be when dealing with real people and events? Does it matter that the rape scenes early in the novel are purely fictional given the fact that so many slave women were victims of sexual violence? Does it matter that Tituba was an Amerindian slave rather than an African slave given the fact that so many Native Americans were enslaved or slaughtered by European colonizers? Does it matter that there is no evidence of Tituba's involvement in Caribbean slave rebellions given the fact that many forgotten women did participate? Does it matter that Tituba could never have envisaged the decimation of American Indians, Ku Klux Klan lynchings or the ghettoization of American Blacks that she mentions in her narrative (136, 170, 177-78)? To many critics, it doesn't seem to matter at all! Respected African-American scholars such as Charles Johnson and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., both praise the novel in cover blurbs and in an incredible statement in the "Foreword" to the English translation, Angela Y. Davis (of Black Power and Communist Party fame) labels the claim that Tituba was Indian a plot "to stir up enmity between black and Native American women as [they] seek to create [their] respective histories" (xi). Davis glorifies Condé's novel not only because it recreates the suppressed cultural history of Afro-Caribbean women, but because it is an act of revenge.

By invoking the victimization of several groups—Africans, women, Indians, Jews, colonized peoples—Condé cleverly appeals to the anger of all victimized and marginalized groups and to the righteous indignation of high-minded liberals. But clearly Condé does not want the simple reaction: sympathy for the innocent victims. In her study, *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*, Françoise Lionnet tells us that Maryse Condé views all ideologies with skepticism and refuses to fetishize slavery in the historical novel. According to Lionnet, "she rejects aesthetic, exotic, or political prejudices that tend to fetishize the past and to idealize political activism, nature, or the people" (71-73). This refusal to celebrate victimization is made clear in the novel in the scene where Benjamin Cohen's eldest daughter tries to comfort Tituba by saying: "Don't you know that God blesses those who suffer and that's how he recognizes his own people?" Tituba shakes her head and responds: "Metahebel, isn't it time the victims changed sides?" (II, 8). For Condé, History is a narrative discourse that can be suffered, or it can be taken on and inverted in a way that rejects the values of the colonizers (Lionnet 174-75). That is why Condé willingly borrows numerous details from Ann Petry's novel but rejects the sugarcoated treatment that presents Tituba as innocent and rewards her forbearance with a happily-ever-after ending. Condé is not plagiarizing; she is consciously rewriting Petry and History because she wants Tituba to be a witch, but a witch in the Afro-Caribbean sense of the word—a woman with knowledge of the natural world and spiritual links to the invisible world. She wants her to be guilty of doing harm to her evil enemies and challenging the authority of those who abuse her. And finally, she wants Tituba to subvert historical perspectives and cultural codes radically in order to re-invent herself in her own words.

All of this brings me to my last point on how we are to read *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Carefully. As much as I admire Maryse Condé as a writer, I worry that she is substituting one erasure for another by knowingly or unknowingly transforming Tituba from an Indian to an African slave. Is she substituting one intentionally false, ideologically motivated set of facts for a version of History unintentionally flawed by biases? In the name of resistance and revenge, is she demonizing white Anglos the way they demonized Indians and Africans in the colonial period? For me, the troubling aspect of *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* is that it is so well-written and so emotionally charged that readers will continue to ignore the author's warning against reading it as a serious historical novel and the true Tituba Indian will be destined to another false representation, different but just as false as those of Longfellow, Fiske, Starkey, and Williams. But then, maybe that's the point for Condé: there can be no authoritative, objective, true representation of the past, so why not write a good story that mystifies and satisfies at the same time.

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