

# Rupturing Salem, Reconsidering Subjectivity: Tituba, the Witch of Infinity in Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*\*

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**Abstract:** *The Salem witch-hunt, invoking the “red hunt” analogy of the McCarthy era, has been a persistent metaphor for persecution, a symbol of fanatic excess in policing the community boundaries. In American cultural history, however, Salem is regarded American only insofar as it proves un-American—as an exception to American exceptionalism. In particular, Tituba, the only non-white “witch” of the trials to whom the unleashing of the hysteria itself has often been attributed, embodies what is negated in Salem against which Americanness is to be affirmed. Maryse Condé’s 1986 novel, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* recuperates Tituba from this darkness not only to reconfigure American identity but ultimately to reconsider human subjectivity. In Condé’s Salem, New England Puritanism showcases the primal scene of American identity formation, in which the personal, national, and religious subjectivities are fused to form the American self as the autonomous self-possessed individual. Tituba, in contrast, exemplifies an alternative subjectivity as an embodied being constituted in relation to others. Similar to Emmanuel Levinas’s ethical subject, Condé’s Tituba highlights the primacy of the other in the formation of the human subject, ultimately rupturing the totality of history with a counter-history of silenced voices or the infinity of the other.*

**Keywords:** Salem witch trials, Tituba the black witch, Puritan origins in American identity, ethical subjectivity, totality and infinity

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The Salem witch-hunt, invoking the “red hunt” analogy of the McCarthy era, has been a persistent metaphor for persecution, a symbol of fanatic excess in policing community boundaries. Salem has been an enduring specter that haunts American cultural history, conjured time and again only to be dismissed as an abnormal episode of old world superstition, which “appeared to take place *in* America but was never *of* America” (Adams 25). Though inseparable from New England Puritanism and thus integral to what is deemed as “quintessential” America, Salem is American only insofar as it proves un-American—that is, an exception to exceptional America as proclaimed in its founding ideals of democracy and human rights. In other words, Salem disavowed is constitutive of American national identity’s coming into being; it is a foundational other, in Donald E. Pease’s psychoanalytic terms, that endows the collective fantasy of American exceptionalism with ontological consistency (12). In particular, Tituba, the only non-white “witch” of the trials to whom the unleashing of the hysteria itself has often been attributed, embodies what is negated in Salem against which Americanness is to be affirmed. As Maryse Condé, a French Guadeloupean novelist, delves into this foundational gap three hundred years later, Tituba is recuperated from this darkness not only to reconfigure American identity but ultimately to reconsider what it means to be human.

*I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (published as *Moi, Tituba, sorcière ... noire de Salem* in 1986 and translated into English in 1992) is a fictional revision of the infamous history from the hitherto ignored perspective of Tituba, a slave from Barbados. In imaginatively reconstructing Tituba’s life, Condé provides her with a symbolic genealogy in the history of transatlantic migration and slavery. Tituba is conceived as a hybrid product of modern history, born of an African mother who was raped by an English sailor on board the *Christ the King* during the Middle Passage. Growing up in Barbados, she learns the arts of voodoo and marries John Indian, her husband in real life, before both are sold to Samuel Parris, a minister from Boston, and brought to Salem Village. The intervening story of the witchcraft trials follows historical records, after which she makes her fictional journey back home and joins a failed slave revolt against plantation owners. Tituba gets executed by hanging, but her spirit lives on and incites future revolts. If Tituba’s racial identity endows her with historical complexities, her powerful sexuality functions as a means to reclaim subjectivity. She passionately falls in love with John Indian and maintains throughout her life a number of romantic liaisons, including a Jewish merchant, a young revolutionary half her age, and even a fictional Hester Prynne.

Thus, by summoning Tituba into the realm of literary imagination, the novel connects the English Caribbean with the colonial United States, bringing the question of American identity into transnational as well as transhistorical consideration. Specifically, by juxtaposing Tituba's Caribbeanness with colonial Americanness, Condé explores the complex interconnectedness of identities across spatial and temporal boundaries, and in doing so, she calls for the reader's renewed attention to what it means to be human. In her words, she desires to focus on "the particular story" of Tituba rather than such "generalities" as "giving voice to the silenced collectivity," on her individual self rather than her collective identity (Scarboro 204).<sup>1</sup>

Although Tituba is a real-life figure from an actual event, *I, Tituba* is not so much a realist historical novel as a postmodernist experimentation. Critics take note of its postmodern/postcolonial exploration of Tituba's identity while highlighting its emphasis on historicity. Specifically, the novel cleverly escapes "the double trap" of the historical novel's claim of representing reality as well as the notorious postmodern turn to "freeplay" (Arnold 714). Thereby, it does not so much play with "historical indeterminacy" as it pursues "historical truths," if not about Tituba's factual life, then about Puritanism in colonial New England (Jalalzai 413). In so doing, *I, Tituba* illustrates an alternative Caribbean identity that defies the double bind of *either* assimilation *or* opposition to white colonial rule, resisting "identitary essence" (Bécel 609-14).

Moreover, Tituba's racial and sexual identities are given particular attention in recuperating her historical absence in contrast to the prominent presence of Salem in American history. Critics point out that if race determines Tituba's erasure, sexuality is the primary venue for the reclamation of her agency. For example, in bringing together Tituba and Hester Prynne in the fictional terrain and juxtaposing the two women's deaths, Tituba executed/silenced and Hester suicidal/self-willed, the novel illustrates how race forced Tituba into the shadow of Nathaniel Hawthorne's prominence in American literary scene, argues Mara Dukats, because "when we paint

1 Caribbean literature gained its initial momentum with Aimé Césaire's negritude movement in the 1930s, which identified itself exclusively with Afro-Caribbean ethnicity. In an attempt to better address the diversity of this region, Edouard Glissant coined *Antillanité* or Caribbeanness in the 1980s to highlight the hybrid cultural heritage. As a "re-visioning" of negritude and Caribbeanness, "creoleness" emerged in 1989 emphasizing "the exploration of the self" beyond the recuperation of the collective past and celebrating its unique diversity in "a liberated, nonauthoritarian expression." (Scarboro 190-92)

Hester black, then *The Scarlet Letter*, as we know it, becomes inconceivable” (51-61).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, Tituba’s sexuality is highlighted to reconfigure her identity. As a sexual subject, Tituba refuses first and foremost the scripted role of enslaved women as the victim of rape—as “objects of violence” and “subjects of fear” (Manzor-Coats 740). Similarly, Tituba’s flagrant celebration of erotic love signals her claim of agency as the subject of desire and thus, as the human subject. Particularly interesting is Kaiama Glover’s take on Tituba’s sexuality as the primary marker of human condition—as embracing human “fallability” “without Adamic shame” (“Confronting the Communal” 187). According to her, Tituba’s sexual choice indicates her determination to “fall,” and in privileging her “sexual selfhood” over various conditions of enslavement, she chooses “an existential liberation” (“Tituba’s Fall” 103).<sup>3</sup>

At this juncture, a set of questions may arise if we regard Tituba’s sexual choice as her conscious act of choosing human freedom. To begin with, we may wonder what it means to be human and to have the freedom to choose. If Tituba chose to be human and free, why was she denied her humanity as well as freedom? Was her understanding of being human different from what was proclaimed so famously by America’s Founding Fathers? If so, how was her conception different from theirs? In thus linking together the English Caribbean with the colonial United States, I would argue, Condé questions the liberal humanist assumptions underlying American identity. Liberal humanism, broadly defined in the cultural tradition of the West, is premised upon *self-possessed individualism*, positing the subject as the owner of oneself and absolutely independent from the world. Of course, its problematic dualism has long been criticized for constructing the privileged subject as a white European male and suppressing the rest of the otherwise marked humanity. *I, Tituba* is one of such critical attempts to probe into an alternative possibility of becoming human. Specifically, in Condé’s Salem, the New England Puritans come to showcase the primal scene of American

2 Condé summons Hester as Tituba’s jail mate, who hangs herself while pregnant with Pearl.

3 For further critical studies on the novel, see the following. Lisa Bernstein approaches the witch figure as a deconstruction of fixed notions of subjectivity; Mara L. Dukats in “A Narrative of Violated Maternity” reads Tituba’s story as a critique of compulsory maternity; Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi pays attention to the authorial position of Condé in the textualization of Tituba’s story; Larysa Mykyta takes Tituba’s female friendships as existing on the “lesbian continuum”; Faye Ringel takes interest in the fantastic world of witches, ghosts, and spirits as part of this world; Suzanne Roszak compares Condé’s Tituba with Arthur Miller’s play in terms of the Bildungsroman; and Merinda K. Simmons focuses on the question of “authenticity” along shifting subject positions.

identity formation, in which the personal, national, and religious subjectivities are fused to form the American self as the autonomous self-possessed individual. Tituba, in contrast, exemplifies an alternative meaning of the subject as the *embodied being-in-relations* destined to come to terms with the self in an ethical relationship with the other. In short, Condé's Tituba illustrates how human freedom is not absolutely possessed by the individual but relational in interpersonal/ transnational and sedimentary/transhistorical senses.

### Self-Possessed Puritans in America's Salem

Though Salem continued to be an enduring presence over the succeeding course of American history, its signification changed under the shifting historical circumstances. The Salem witchcraft trials proceeded from January 1692 to May 1693 in Essex County, Massachusetts. Nineteen women were hanged, one man was pressed to death by heavy stones, and eight more were convicted but escaped execution.<sup>4</sup> Although the signifying modes for Salem changed down the course of history, its status as the national Other continued to persist. According to Gretchen Adams, during the eighteenth-century Revolutionary and nation-building era, Salem was to represent everything that America was supposedly *not*—old world, savage, and irrational as opposed to the new nation, modern and rational; and during the Civil War, radical abolitionists were attacked as “intolerant fanatics” and “witch burner[s]” (26). In the postbellum Reconstruction era, however, the

4 Explanations vary as to the causes of the Salem hysteria. The pre-Enlightenment worldview underlay many witchcraft suspicions as natural phenomena or illnesses, lacking logical or scientific accounts, were attributed to supernatural powers. Especially as traditional communal ties broke down in the early modern period, the villagers would refuse to offer charitable assistance to their poorer neighbors, and when subsequently experiencing misfortunes, they would project their own feelings of guilt onto those whose requests they had rejected, accusing them as malevolent witches responsible for the putative afflictions. Specifically with regard to the Salem witch-hunt, some scholars pay attention to political, economic, familial, and religious conflicts among the residents of Salem Village while others find links to a concurrent and prolonged Indian war on the Maine-New Hampshire frontier. For a historical overview of the scholarly approaches to the Salem witchcraft trials, see Mary Beth Norton's article, “Witchcraft in the Anglo-American Colonies” (2003). Sir Keith Thomas examines witchcraft accusations in early modern England in *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (1971). Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum locate the origins of the Salem hysteria in land disputes among the residents in *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (1974); and Mary Beth Norton traces frontier connections and links to Indian warfare in *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (2002).

Puritan as the national icon was summoned back for reconciliation, but the less problematic Pilgrim was to substitute the Puritan as the single symbol of colonial founding: “The relatively unknown Plymouth Pilgrim was easily shaped to serve as the exemplar of the newly important American value of ‘tolerance’ while the Puritan’s reputation declined under the stigma of ‘intolerance’” (Adams 26). Finally, as the full-scale cold war raged in the mid-twentieth century, Puritan New England of 1692 was summoned once again to name McCarthy’s America of 1952, and by marking the ideological persecution as Salem-like hysteria, it was dismissed as yet another aberrant episode of fanaticism in the otherwise rational progress of American history.

As such, Salem epitomizes a contradiction in American identity, whose Puritan tradition is simultaneously upheld and dismissed as much American as it is un-American. To borrow from Pease, Salem functions as the national Other onto which the inherent contradiction in the “state fantasy” of American exceptionalism is projected, explaining away the national ideal’s failure to come about as an aberration, or an exception to American exceptionalism. These “psychosocial structures of disavowal” were crucial, according to Pease, to “the production of the state’s exceptions insofar as they sustained the attitude through which U.S. citizens willfully misrepresented their history as well as their place in the world” (12). Interestingly, as historical changes mandated different takes on Salem to re-imagine America, Tituba’s identity transformed alongside from “Indian” to black, illuminating that the racial/ethnic axis functions as the crucial formative site of the national Other.

If Salem has been the indivisible shadow that shaped and clarified the contours of America’s self-image, Tituba, whether Native American or African in origin, incarnates racialized trajectories of American identity. An “Indian” to her contemporaries in times of bloody “Indian wars,” she became “Negro” in the mid-nineteenth century when the institution of slavery was most controversial, solidifying into a voodoo-practicing Afro-Caribbean American by the mid-twentieth century in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953).<sup>5</sup> Her transformation from Native American to black illuminates the

5 Elaine Breslaw sees her as an Arawak Indian, who had been kidnapped to Barbados where she was purchased and brought to New England by Samuel Parris. Peter Charles Hoffer, on the other hand, argues that she was a Yoruban African on the basis of the etymology of her name. But as Bernard Rosenthal says,

racial/ethnic components of the “scapegoat,” as Bernard Rosenthal puts it, against which America needed to project its “guilt, fear, and hatred” (50). In other words, Tituba embodies the racialized national Other to explain away the failure of the national ideal as an exception to American exceptionalism. In Toni Morrison’s terms, she is the Africanist presence in the shadow of American identity formation: “a nonwhite, Africanlike (or Africanist) presence or persona” in American literature, crucial to the making of a coherent sense of “Americanness” (5-6). It was not until Condé’s 1986 scrutiny into the vestiges of Salem that Tituba came out of her long shadow to shed light on the violence of history that was the violation of humanity.

In Condé’s fictional space, the Puritans in colonial New England represent the ideological assumptions about subjectivity as *disembodied self-possession*. According to C. B. Macpherson’s analysis of “possessive individualism,” the subject is first and foremost *self-possessed* in that he is “the proprietor of his own person or capacities” and that human freedom means “freedom from dependence on the wills of others” (3). The individual is conceptualized as the owner of oneself, and he is free insofar as he holds the right to dispose at will his possessions, including his own labor in exchange for wages. The subject, in other words, is projected as a self-possessed being independent of the society of others and endowed with “an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the ‘wills of others’” (Hayles 3). Moreover, the *erasure of embodiment* is another attribute of this stand-alone liberal subject. The famous Cartesian subject is identified with the mind, a disembodied pure reason, and he merely contemplates with God-like objectivity, rather than inhabits, the material world. In other words, “the liberal subject *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body” (Hayles 4). Separated from the body, the self is thus enabled to claim its notorious universality, erasing racial, ethnic, and sexual markers of bodily difference.

the etymology argument is useless because “nobody knows how Tituba received her name” (49). In a cultural sense, according to Rosenthal, she seems of Indian ethnicity since the legal documents of her day consistently define her as “Indian” while making clear distinctions between “Indians” and “Negroes” (49). Tituba the Indian becomes darker and enters the world of myths in the nineteenth century with Charles W. Upham’s *Lectures on Witchcraft, Comprising a History of the Delusion in Salem in 1692* (1831) and *Salem Witchcraft* (1867). It was Upham who created the image of Tituba telling “exotic” tales of witchcraft from the Caribbean Islands to a circle of credulous girls of Salem. An ambiguously pigmented “dark Tituba” then merges with the myth of original sin, and this “dark Eve” serves as the evil other in the making of the American self (Rosenthal, *Salem Story* 13).

Such a notion of subjectivity constitutes the backbone of American identity, as it was famously declared that “all men” are created equal and endowed with basic rights for life, liberty and happiness (Jefferson 19). But the premise of proclaimed freedom and equality was based on possessive individualism, where the subject can be autonomous insofar as he owns mental and material capacities, and as the self-owner, he is free to use his own capacities as well as equal in the sameness of self-ownership because it is “a status that every individual can enjoy equally” (Carens 2). In colonial America, however, the alleged universality of freedom and equality was in fact conditional and exclusive as one’s humanness was defined in terms of race, gender, and material ownership. It meant only a propertied man of European descent could fall into the category of the human since women and non-white people were regarded as incapable of rational thinking and thus, unfit for citizenship. This inconsistency in American identity has been manifested in numerous junctures of American history from the persecution in Salem to the institution of slavery. Perhaps, Thomas Jefferson himself, the epitome of American Enlightenment ideology, is also the prominent embodiment of this foundational contradiction. The progenitor of the free and equal American subject was a slave-holder who believed in the hierarchy of humanity according to skin color, from the white down to the black to the “Oranootan” at the bottom, thereby advocating the removal of freed slaves “beyond the reach of mixture” for fear of “staining the blood of his master” (Jefferson 264-70).

In *I, Tituba*, America’s national narrative is given as Hester’s symbolic ancestry, originating with the arrival of the Pilgrims on the *Mayflower*, “fervent Separatists who had come to build the kingdom of the true God” — “dangerous” projects, in Hester’s words, which begat the “fanaticism” of their descendants (97). New England Puritan ideology has been frequently proposed as the primal factor in the construction of American identity. Sacvan Bercovitch, in his seminal *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, delineates the trinitarian fusion in the formation of the American self: “country, saint, and church reflected one another,” and “the idea of America implied all three in the proper apocalyptic context” (101). By combining personal and national identity with millennial soteriology, the New England Puritans gave America “the status of visible sainthood” and the literature of “the anthropomorphic nationalism”: “American dream, manifest destiny, redeemer nation, and, fundamentally, the American self as representative of universal rebirth” (108). Underlying the trinitarian American self is the fa-



miliar Western worldview of binary divisions, which, unfortunately, entails violence. For in this divided universe, the elected, whether to be saved or to build “a city upon a hill,” confronted the others as damned—as threats to be identified and purged, and the New World was a hostile wilderness for them to tame and possess. The American self is then the self-possessed subject, positioned in a confrontational stance against the surrounding world of others—identified as a threat to his independence or as the objectified material world to be subdued, exploited, and possessed.

Thus, Condé inhabits her imaginative space with self-appointed “visible saints” (98) determined to preserve their elected status, or self-possessive freedom, against any presumably hostile encroachment of the wills of others, or “visible messengers of Satan” (65). When Tituba arrives in Salem Village as a servant of Samuel Parris, the newly appointed minister from whose household the infamous hysteria first broke out, she wonders in bewilderment:

Imagine a small community of men and women oppressed by the presence of Satan and seeking to hunt him down in all his manifestations. A cow that died, a child smitten with convulsions, a girl whose menstrual period was late in coming set off a chain of unending speculation. Who had caused such catastrophes by driving a bargain with the formidable enemy? (65)

Combining the worldview of pre-Enlightenment superstition and biblical mysticism, early Puritans seem to have dwelled in the frightening universe of binary morality, fiercely vindictive to those branded as others and literally hunting them down as “witches.” Problematically, otherness is usually marked upon the socially weak by those more empowered in a given society—notably, in terms of gender, race, and class. In Salem, along with the women persecuted as witches, Tituba’s “color was indicative of [her] close connections with Satan” (65). And her color, defined as the sign of evil/otherness, then served as a sufficient ground to condemn her as “dregs of hell” (36) and reduce her humanity into property relations of the slave system, “striking [her] off the map of human beings” as “a nonbeing” (24).

The liberal dichotomy also effaces the embodiment of the human subject. The liberal subject is to *possess* the body, but not *be* the body. The body is positioned as the opposite of the soul, the evil/other dragging down the soul’s lofty journey toward liberation. The Puritan denial of the body and earthly pleasure is manifest even in their grim attire. Betsey and

Abigail, two children of the Parris household whose hysterical outbursts marked the beginning of the witchcraft trials, were “wearing long black gowns that contrasted with their small white aprons,” and “their brows were capped with hoods, where every wisp of hair had been pushed out of sight” (39). The body, especially the beauty of the female body, is synonymous with evil temptation and therefore, subject to strict surveillance and discipline. Elizabeth, Samuel Parris’s wife, tells Tituba that the abomination is so great for Parris as to make him “take [her] without removing either his clothes or [hers], so hurried is he to finish with the hateful act” (42). The body and sexual act are the signs of humanity’s fall from grace in Christian mythology—“Satan’s heritage in us” (42). Similar signs of life and expressions of pleasure are prohibited: children are not to be told imaginative stories because “dreaming isn’t good for them” (43), nor are they supposed to “dance” (48). It is a society that, as Elizabeth laments to Tituba, places “a curse on being a woman”—a society of “malediction” (43), or *male-diction* that dictates the lives of women and people of color under the binary law of the father.

### **Tituba, the Witch of Infinity**

Unlike the Puritans who saw their subjectivity as *disembodied self-possession*, Tituba always takes herself as the *embodied being-in-relations*. For her, the human being is not so much a stand-alone subject with absolute autonomy as a bodily being in relation to others existing across space and time. Here, Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of the other might help elucidate the key differences in supposing the human subject. The bodiless autonomous Puritan self proposes the human being as a concept in a neutral third realm that Levinas calls a *totality*. It is the totalizing system like the Hegelian *Geist* into which individuals are subsumed as parts of the whole or as examples of the same species. So when *I* find myself existing in this neutral universe, I take the other people and things as the same as *me* and as objects disposable for *my* enjoyment and use. It is characteristic of subjectivism in the Western philosophical tradition, which places the self in the center of perception and treats the other either as an extension of myself or as a mere object. Thus, in the totalizing process, there is always a violence done to the singular because “every singularity escapes its concept” and “it is what the concept has to control and repress by abolishing difference” (Large 24). In contrast, Tituba comes forward as a bodily/sexual subject, who always perceives herself in relation to other beings. For her, the other is not part of *her* existential proj-

ect, but the alien being she comes to know as radically different. To put otherwise, the object of the idea is greater than the idea of it, and my experience of the other is not reducible to an idea of my having that experience. This going-beyond-*my*-experience by giving willed effort to transcend subjectivism of totalizing thinking is what Levinas calls *infinity*.

With this “concept of *infinity*,” this “‘beyond’ the totality and objective experience,” Levinas urges us to imagine a different model of subjectivity (23), and as the embodied being-in-relations, Tituba epitomizes this alternative subjectivity, which seeks to transcend the violence of subjectivism and to become a free and responsible individual. For Levinas, the primary process of subject formation begins with the other, not with the self. In his ethics, the self is constituted as a posterior to the other, whose absolute foreignness demands me to give “a real response, a responsible answer” (Wild 14) and thereby to recognize the other as a being independent from my egocentric conceptualization. The self cannot escape this coming face to face with the other because the human subject is a bodily being conditioned to exist in the material world of others. This experience of being “already split from within,” as though “the other occupied my place despite me” (Large 8), is the fundamental condition of the subject that is never self-contained and autonomous but always already “open” to the world. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts it, the subject is from the beginning “destined to the world” (xii), or “I am from the start outside myself and open to the world” (Doyle). This openness of the self to the demand of the other, which Levinas calls an “extra-territoriality” (150), is the existential condition precisely because the human subject is an embodied being that comes into existence through perception. And the process of perception happens in a time lag, a gap within the self because I exist simultaneously as the perceiving subject and the object of perception: I speak and hear myself, for example, in a circle of time that is *almost* but never completely closed. This creates an existential loophole opening up the subject to the world. This “noncoincidence” is, according to Laura Doyle, “the pivot of my-existence-in-the-world, the split second when existence happens.”<sup>6</sup>

Condé’s project of recuperating Tituba’s humanity primarily concerns claiming her agency as a powerfully sexual being. Tituba flaunts her body

6 According to Merleau-Ponty, the subject is always *intersubject* or *being-in-the-world*. The slippage inherent in the constitution of subjectivity enables the self to place oneself as an object in a complex field of relations as intersubjects.

and delights in erotic love with multiple lovers throughout her fictional life. Tituba's sexuality is precisely a means not just to reclaim but also to re-define subjectivity as the embodied being inherently open to the other. For her, the body is not an object to be ashamed of but her very being realized by the process of mutual recognition: "What is more beautiful than a woman's body! Especially when it is glorified by man's desire!" (43) Sex, for her, is "the most beautiful act in the world," not "the hateful act," and it represents "life" and procreation, not "Satan's heritage" (42). When she first fell for John Indian, her husband both in historical and fictional life, she admits without reservation that what "[made her] sick with love for him" was "the huge bump of his penis" (19). And when she dances for the first time in their initial courtship, she alludes to the biblical myth of original sin, rewriting it as a symbolic act of (pro)creation: "A mysterious serpent had entered me. Was it the primordial snake [...] in the form of god the creator of all things on the surface of the earth?" (17) The body, for Tituba, is neither an object to be controlled nor a concept to be subsumed in the Puritan totality of possessive individualism. Rather, embodiedness is the fundamental human condition, where my existence happens as both the subject and object through constant interactions with the world. It is the basis of ethical subjectivity because I am not only grounded "in my everyday existence," but more importantly "in my relation to the other, who transcends both my practical use of things and their examination" (Large 40).

For Tituba, human subjectivity rests not so much on the assertion of absolute freedom from the wills of others. On the contrary, it comes into existence when freedom is inverted into obligation to others. In order to move in with John Indian, a slave of Susanna Endicott, Tituba chooses to become a slave of her own free will. In first meeting the mistress and her visitors, she is shocked to experience a violent erasure of her being: "They were talking about me and yet ignoring me. [...] Tituba only existed insofar as these women let her exist. It was atrocious. Tituba became ugly, coarse, and inferior because they will her so" (24). Theirs is the totalizing universe that reduces the other as *my* extension or an object I can manipulate according to my will and advantage. As Tituba laments, "the slaves [...] were far freer than I was. For the slaves had not chosen their chains. [...] That is exactly what I had done" (25). In choosing self-enslavement, she upholds, as Glover argues, "a freedom of sexual choice," privileging "an existential liberation" over social emancipation from slavery ("Tituba's Fall" 103).

Tituba's fierce assertion of her sexual selfhood signifies her determined refusal to subscribe to the master tropes of the American slave narrative: the enslaved black woman as victim of rape on the one hand, and the narrative of progress from slavery to liberation and enlightenment on the other hand. In so doing, Tituba sheds light on "the sexual will" of the enslaved woman, typically silenced in the slave narrative as the "virtuous" heroine proceeds toward "predetermined models of freedom" ("Tituba's Fall" 99, 104-105).

Tituba's sexuality establishes her as the subject of desire, and more importantly, as the ethical subject. For *desire*, according to Levinas, is precisely that which transcends me and my self-centered categories: it is the will to experience what is "absolutely other" (33). Unlike *need*, which seeks to fill a lack in the subject, "the Desire does not fulfil it, but deepens it" (Levinas 34) because if I desire or love someone, "the more of them I have the more I love them" (Large 25). Tituba's choice to be a slave is an act of love that impels her to take the risk of going out of her way and trying to give to the other. Whereas possessive individualism posits the other as a threat to the freedom of the self, ethical subjectivity recognizes the freedom of the other as their independence from me and my arbitrary categories. Whereas identifying the other as a threat incurs a need to suppress and expunge it, recognizing the other as independent from me entails an acknowledgement of the exteriority within interiority—the presence of the other already inhabiting the self from within. This split self-consciousness leads to, like W. E. B. DuBois's "double consciousness" (45), the recognition of my dependency on the other for the constitution of the self. Thus, the ethical subject begins by inverting my freedom into my obligation to the other: "Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent" (Levinas 84).

The contradiction in that Tituba has to submit to a bondage in order to be free originates in the institution of slavery—the binary universe of possessive individualism which premises my freedom upon the suppression of the other. In the inversion of her freedom, in contrast, Tituba acknowledges the originary dependency of the self on the other, thus recognizing that freedom rests in not so much my right as my obligation to the other. After all the lovers she has had in her life, Tituba confesses towards the end of the novel that her "heart" "had never belonged to anybody else but John Indian" (170), whom she loved, despite his slavish subservience to white masters and his eventual betrayal of her trust, for his "weakhearted[ness]" (152), and she confides, "some men who have the virtue of being weak instill in us

the desire to be a slave!” (140) In recognizing the weakness in her husband, Tituba sees the violence of the totalizing system of slavery, and in choosing self-enslavement for him, she inverts her freedom to experience his radical otherness. Tituba’s insistent sexuality to the point of self-enslavement is then testimony to her extraordinary ability to transcend the self and to desire the infinity of the other.

Ethical subjectivity is most clearly illustrated in Condé’s deliberate reconstruction of Tituba as “the witch.” As Elizabeth Reis propounds, the seventeenth-century New England witch trials were unleashed primarily because Puritanism functioned as lived religion for people, who believed in Satan’s physical presence and literal possession of weaker souls and bodies, often feminine because they were supposed to be more vulnerable than men. Besides, the devil’s possession of the witches, according to Boris Vejdovsky, had sexual connotations, disturbing the established order and authority of Puritan fathers and leading to witch hunts as a result of “anxieties of sexual inadequacy and logocentric impotency”: “Witchcraft, embodied in the flesh of the witches and their victims, threatens to unman the patriarchs of the colonies and send them back to self-doubt and impotence” (60). In other words, the Salem witch hunts, manifested in terms of economic, local political, and psychological conflicts, boil down to the patriarchal subject’s paranoid attempts to police and subsume the other within the boundaries of totality. In *I, Tituba*, Condé ruminates on the symbolic meaning of the witch as the historical and metaphoric other in a totalizing system from patriarchy to slavery to racist society. Terrified when witnessing an execution of a witch named Goody Glover<sup>7</sup> by a “restless, inquisitive, almost joyful crowd” of Salem (49), Tituba explicitly connects the incident with the deaths of her mother and herself by another kind of mob violence, an allusion to lynching: “All around me strange trees were bristling with strange fruit” (172). Thus, in her “powerless rage,” Tituba screams: “What kind of a world was this that had turned me into a slave, an orphan, and an outcast?” (49)

Condé, in contrast, redefines the witch as the very epitome of infinity, incarnating the desire to transcend the self and experience the absolute other.

7 This episode is Condé’s reference to the story of the Goodwin children that had been well known through Cotton Mather’s account in “Memorable Providences.” In 1688, the four Goodwin children were afflicted, and a woman identified as Glover was accused of bewitching them and hanged for it. (Rosenthal, *Salem Story* 2)

For Tituba, the witch is born with “a superior gift of nature” “to communicate with the invisible world, to keep constant links with the dead, to care for others and heal” (17). The witch teaches us “the upper spheres of knowledge” that “everything lives, has a soul, and breathes,” that “everything must be respected,” and that “man is not the master riding through his kingdom on horseback” (9). In short, Tituba embodies the witch as the ethical subject that surpasses the self to communicate with the other. Also, to desire the other who transcends me means, for Levinas, to seek truth because seeking truth is “movement outwards towards the other,” not “the reduction of the world to myself” (Large 33). It is an act of desire because it wants more than the satisfaction of my need to know the world, and desire is only possible in relation to the other. Unlike the solipsistic God of the Puritan universe that divides the master from the rest, truth or this “God” is concerned with the destitution of the other and can only be found in our ethical relation to others: “God rises to his supreme and ultimate presence as correlative to the justice rendered unto men” (Levinas 78). For Tituba, truth is not the cognitive subsumption of particular individuals into the abstract concepts of totality. Truth for her means to go beyond the basic need to “stay alive”: “No, [being alive] wasn’t all that mattered. Life, life had to be given a new meaning. But how?” (137) In other words, truth means to love and desire the other, to acknowledge the anteriority of the other in the constitution of the subject, and to choose self-enslavement in the inversion of her freedom as a recognition of the irreducible singularity of the other.

### **Afterword**

In her fictional post-Salem life, Tituba is executed by hanging for helping organize a slave revolt back in Barbados, and “[her] real story starts where this one leaves off and it has no end” (175). She becomes “one and the same” with her beloved island, and in this “constant and extraordinary symbiosis” with nature, she takes her ultimate “revenge” for her “long solitude in the deserts of America” (177). Her spirit, so to speak, is alive and among us as memory because the dead “live on if we cherish them and honor their memory” (10). Dismissed from history except only as a summary footnote, “a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing ‘hoodoo’” (110), Tituba literally steps outside of totalizing history: “I do not belong to the civilization of the Bible and Bigotry. My people will keep my memory in their hearts and have no need for the written word” (176).

History is a closed totality because its narrative begins and ends with the writing subject's projection and validation of existing concepts and categories, and that is why history is always the justification of the victors. Thus, violence of history, be it war, slavery, or patriarchy, would not be ceased without completely breaking with history. This rupture with history, which Levinas calls "prophetic eschatology" (22), provides an exterior viewpoint from outside of the historical narrative, and thus, forever on the side of the victims, it tells the stories of silenced voices.

Tituba's "revenge" is then this telling of a different reality, the suffering of others, reminding us of the silenced presence of the other in history, or the exteriority within interiority of human subjectivity. Ironically, by becoming a spirit in the world, Tituba effectively illustrates the human subject as the embodied being-in-relations, or the body as the incarnation of thousands of years of human history. Her spirit is alive in the sedimented simultaneity of the past, present, and future, and her story is counter to history because it constantly intervenes from outside and ruptures the totality of history with the infinity of the other. As Tituba confides in us, "What is one life in relation to the immensity of time?" (178)

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