

Felix Shapiro's

*Race, Gender and the French Caribbean Allegory:*

*Aimé Césaire's A Tempest and Maryse Condé's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*



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*Aimé Césaire's A Tempest and Maryse Condé's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*

by

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the employment of allegory in relationship to the Black gendered body in French Caribbean literature in A Tempest by Aimé Césaire and I, Tituba...Black Witch of Salem by Maryse Condé. These two texts work over and between the spaces created by canonical European and American fiction while simultaneously placing themselves in conversation with traditional and twentieth century Black and African literary and historical movements. Additionally I show how allegorical representations speak to the Caribbean's own hold on European, American and African literary and political histories and the way Césaire and Condé imbue their protagonists and their own historical moments with agency.

In chapter I, I trace Césaire's heuristic deconstruction and re/appropriation of race, social realism and masculinity that deconstructs and synthesizes Hegel's master-slave dialectic that revalorizes Caliban. By positing Prospero as Ariel's father, *A Tempest* brings into the open centuries of power impositions by White men on Black women in Caribbean society. Adapting social realism and existential theatre in the play, I trace Césaire attempts to merge Négritude with his roots in the French Communist Party. That both Négritude and his Communist roots prove problematically masculine informs my analysis of *A Tempest's* reworking of the positionality of Sycorax and Miranda. It also informs the analysis of Condé's work that I offer in Chapter II.

In Chapter II, I examine Condé's revalorization of the Black female body in the context of what we might call post-Négritude and post-second wave feminist movements. This thesis follows Condé's attempt to respond through fiction and allegory to what she perceives as the masculine structuralist barriers in Caribbean fiction. The novel, I show, privileges and redefines fertility in such a way that allows Tituba agency over the reproductive process. Through a close reading of Tituba's relationship with Black men and white women, I demonstrate Condé's bidirectional critique of identity politics movements that reify or elide the Black woman's voice. It is through Condé and Tituba's control of the deployment of allegory both within and without the novel that sparks the text's unique agency.

By driving allegory through the mode of the Black body, I illustrate how Césaire and Condé deconstruct and ultimately reconstruct the racial, gendered and semiotic meanings that have been mapped onto them and how these texts in turn offer historically specific visions for the future.

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## *Introduction*

“I make the cry my maker cannot make”, cries Robert Browning for Caliban upon Setebos. Browning’s proclamation provides a useful framework for approaching two of the most important works of Caribbean fiction of the twentieth century. Aimé Césaire’s 1968 play A Tempest reworks, among other things, the life of Caliban in William Shakespeare’s play The Tempest. Similarly, Maryse Condé’s 1986 I, Tituba...Black Witch of Salem (I, Tituba) reworks, among other things, the life of Tituba, a slave accused of witchcraft in late seventeenth century Salem. But who is crying for whom? Who is the crier and who is the maker?

Certainly in one sense, Césaire and Condé make their cry for Caliban and Tituba. The act of rewriting foundational texts, and the act of filling in the silences that surround historical records invite us to imagine their work as speaking for a larger group of people. Indeed, the inclination to speak on behalf of oneself and others requires a strategic essentialism of identity politics.

In the context of speaking for others, it is Césaire and Condé who speak for Caliban and Tituba, yet this means it is Caliban and Tituba who are Césaire and Condé’s “maker”. That the authors are constructed by their characters – and not the other way around – points to the manner in which Caliban and Tituba have become archetypes of the Black man and the Black woman; and in particular the attending association of the Black male body and the Black female body. Consider, for instance, the titles of two recent essays: Alden Vaughn’s “Caliban in the ‘Third World’: Shakespeare’s Savage as Sociopolitical Symbol”; and Chadwick Hansen’s more biting “The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can’t Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro”. This

thesis examines the process by which Césaire and Condé appropriate such archetypes and transform them into allegory. It is through this transformation that West Indian<sup>1</sup> writers have deconstructed and relocated canonical texts and have implicated such texts in ways that privilege the Caribbean as a setting and revalorize Black men and Black women as characters.

Allegory, Barbara Johnson succinctly explains, is “merely repeating an existing emblem” (Johnson, 66). Caliban and Tituba are these emblems. From William Shakespeare to Thomas Jefferson to Octave Mannoni to George Lamming, and from Cotton Mather to Arthur Miller to Ann Petry, Caliban and Tituba are offered as devices to herald larger meanings. They are slaves. Sometimes they are depicted as stupid and lazy; at other times they are envisioned as quite intelligent and hardworking. Often they possess some type of magic, and often they practice it. Their names conjure images that are simultaneously permanent and malleable; they are universally recognized as symbols and yet their symbolism is disputed. Caliban’s and Tituba’s hi/stories are like a Wikipedia entry constantly being rewritten by ideologically motivated editors – by those making the cry their maker cannot make. Harold Bloom calls this “creative revisionism” (Bloom, 389).

As allegorical figurations like Caliban and Tituba become interpolated between opposing discursive frameworks and teleologies, however, the memory and meaning of their significance becomes volatile and politically urgent in ways Bloom does not acknowledge. Their definitions are culturally contested through “a sustained collective

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<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking I will use “West Indian” to refer to the French speaking Islands of the Caribbean, and I will use “Caribbean” to refer to the archipelago that politically and geographically encompasses more than “just” the Francophonic islands. Although Condé refers to “the West Indian writer” (see Chapter 2) her invocation of a Barbadian slave speaks to a larger Caribbean narrative.

enterprise” that reflects the historical moment in which they are reconstituted (Greenblatt, 21). Césaire and Condé add their voices to the reworking of the political meanings of Caliban and Tituba by inserting themselves as authors into the fiction they create.

An epigraph, signed “Maryse Condé”, at the beginning of I, Tituba relates, “Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else” (v). The presence of this note reminds the reader that despite Tituba’s first person narration of the novel, I, Tituba is mediated through Condé. On the one hand, Condé claims a unique authority to write Tituba’s story; their fictional conversations are an imagined relationship, an illustration of the strategic essentialism that enables Condé’s practice. On the other hand, Condé destabilizes her authority as a narrator by pointing out that – with the exception of her brief courtroom testimony – Tituba’s life will always be mediated through the gaze of another, through the gaze of someone making her cry for Tituba.

Césaire similarly imposes himself on the beginning of A Tempest. In the play’s prologue, a Master of Ceremonies – instead of reading an opening poem – assigns roles to the various actors on stage. By revealing the casting and staging of the play Césaire’s prologue once more destabilizes the realism of the text. By uncovering the constructedness of their fictions, Césaire and Condé also uncover the constructedness and reconstructedness of the meanings and definitions of Caliban and Tituba.

Not only do Césaire and Condé insert themselves into their own text and into a relationship with their protagonists, they also implicate other canonical texts as well. Césaire plays on Charles Baudelaire and Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, while Condé alludes to John Milton and Nathaniel Hawthorne. “What we call allusion” Gordon

Teskey reminds us, “is in truth capture, the process by which a work achieves monumentality by taking its substance from the realm of the previously made” (Teskey, 162). Teskey identifies a violence that is also legible in the allegorical fiction of Césaire and Condé that interrupts and writes over the work of canonical authors. Teskey writes, “Allegory is produced out of violence against the monumentality of previous works” (Teskey, 163). Just as Césaire and Condé reveal the constructedness of their fiction, it is in the capture of monumental texts that they reveal the sweeping influences upon which they draw. Thus, “the past gets recoded...in ways that reveal the hybridity of even the most sacred of canonical texts” (Ramanathan and Schlau, 7).

The hybridity of allegory plays out in different ways in Césaire’s and Condé’s works. In *A Tempest* allegory implicates Prospero and creates a Hegelian synthesis that requires the former Duke to stay on the Island. In *I, Tituba*, it speaks to the hybridity of Tituba’s birth, and of the world she creates in her deserted home in Barbados. Indeed, the relationship between the hybridity of race and the family structure and that of the hybridity of texts’ meanings and definitions renders these works in particularly Caribbean terms.

The imagined space of the Caribbean in world fiction relies on both its assumed isolation, as well as its importance as a depository of constant cultural influences from Africa, Europe and the Americas. Tituba and Caliban’s homes both constrain and liberate the text by confronting the trope of the isolated Island in world fiction. Traditionally, the rhetoric of deserted Islands, “suppressed their relationship to the colonial metropole and minimized knowledge of their contributions to the production of [European] literature” (Deloughrey, 13). The ubiquitous intertextualities Césaire and Condé introduce, then,

position their texts within global literary conversations. “The Caribbean experience”, adds Paula Burnett, is always “lived and explored artistically in Europe and North America as well as in the Caribbean region itself” (Burnett, xxiii). Certainly as much is true for Césaire and Condé, the former of whom studied and agitated for many years in Paris, while Columbia University employs the latter as a titled professor. The contact that Césaire and Condé establish with both the Caribbean and the rest of the world engenders a constant assertion of cultural presence. A Tempest and I, Tituba self-interpolate and, in writing allusions to canonical European, African and American texts, reveal the bonds that inextricably connect the Caribbean with the rest of the world.

Both Caliban and Tituba’s stories begin during sea voyages. Tituba is conceived aboard a slave ship while Caliban is conceived in Algeria, but as both characters of African parentage, oceanic pregnancy, and Caribbean birth come into being, their own creation stories delimit their geographical specificity. Indeed the relationship between the Caribbean and the rest of the world allows us to reconfigure Fredric Jameson’s canonical assertion that “the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (Jameson, 69). The constant contact – both discursive and geographical – between the Caribbean and the rest of the world at the very least resists Jameson’s ensuing claim that works like A Tempest and I, Tituba are “alien to us”. Édouard Glissant instead artfully defines Caribbean literature as “a poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everyone possible” (Glissant, 32).

It is with the echo of Glissant’s *Rélation* that in Chapter I, I examine the deconstruction of the sacred monumentality to which Teskey speaks by interrogating

Césaire's depictions of race in *A Tempest*. By revealing the unspoken kinship between all of the play's characters, Césaire provides an allegory of his own appropriation of universal writers. While writing universally, he appeals specifically to male, third world intellectuals. In turn, I look to examine the repercussions of this appeal, particularly in its masculine rhetoric in Chapter II.

There, I examine the centrality of gardening as an allegorical setting. By examining the relationship between syntax and agency, Condé subtly differentiates Tituba from other female characters, both in her fiction and in Césaire's. Tituba's relationships with white women and black men enables Condé to situate herself apart from each group's political and social ideologies in the novel, creating a black feminist aesthetic.

We return, then, to the question of who is making the cry, and who is that individual's maker? It is in the contestation of the semiotic and cultural values of Caliban and Tituba that we find our answer. Caliban and Tituba are allegories, and Césaire and Condé have figured them. Simultaneously, Césaire and Condé acknowledge the way allegorical figurations and refigurations of Caliban and Tituba shape their writing and their selves. It is through their recognition, yet resistance of the allegorical process and reprocess that Césaire and Condé, Caliban and Tituba both ventriloquize and make their cries.

*Chapter I: Allegory Gendered Male in A Tempest*

*What is race if not a big joke? – Nella Larsen Passing*

Aimé Césaire's A Tempest is neither the first nor the last text to map race, colonialism and the Caribbean onto William Shakespeare's The Tempest. The latter depicts a deserted Island where the dukedom-deprived Prospero has deposed Caliban, an inhabitant of the Island, and made him his slave. Prospero has vanquished Caliban's mother Sycorax and lives with his daughter Miranda and the sprightly Ariel. Not unduly, Caliban has thus come to represent "a term of [opprobrium]"; he is lazy, colonized, Other (Bruner, 241).

The play's setting, as many have argued, is firmly of the Caribbean. The name Caliban comes into existence, Roberto Retamar was one of the first to explain, as Shakespeare's anagram of the word cannibal (Retamar, 7). And the word cannibal is itself a corruption of *Caribe* – Columbus' interpretation of the name of a group of peoples in the Caribbean.

In The Tempest, Caliban is a symbol of the male slave. Indeed all of the characters are "symbols of colonial relations and of struggles to forge identity" (Fusco, 6). In the several centuries separating Shakespeare and Césaire, the cultural implications of Shakespeare's play have managed to "render the relationship of colonizer and colonized in fixed, oppositional terms which remain influential long after the interpretive gulfs between cultures have narrowed" (Cartelli, 85). Prospero and Caliban have come to

exist outside the text of Shakespeare's play; they are no longer characters on a deserted Island, but nouns on a page.

Away from the confines of their original five acts, the meaning invested in the words Caliban and Prospero changes. Césaire joins “a sustained collective enterprise” of writers that contest the meaning of Caliban and Prospero both within and without Shakespeare's play (Greenblatt, 21). Over time and space, Caliban becomes “a projection of the desires that each critic has of the character of the text” (Byrd, 38). By deconstructing the value of names like Prospero and Caliban, male, twentieth century third world writers have revalorized the latter and dismissed the former in the service of cultural and political ideologies.

Writing in 1968, Césaire's A Tempest uniquely revitalizes Caliban. Unlike previous writers from the Caribbean and elsewhere, however, Césaire resists the stability of Caliban as metonymy – as a stand-in for the lazy, colonized Other. Instead, Césaire's reworking of the text affords Caliban agency that exists beyond the location of his name or his body. Simultaneously, Césaire incorporates a breadth of reference and allusion into the character of Caliban. That is, Césaire paints Caliban allegorically.

### **Deconstructing Race**

When Césaire's character list defines Caliban as a “Black slave”, and Ariel as a “mulatto slave”, he reworks not only The Tempest, but also the intervening constructions, reconstructions and revaluations of its characters. In reading this relationship between allegory and metonymy, allusion and allusions, we might turn to Roman de la Campa's



creation of the term *episthetics*; “that uncertain interplay between epistemology and aesthetics, from which...language metaphors translate into an immanent sense of rhetorical praxis and agency” (de la Campa, vii). Ariel, Caliban and Prospero inhabit the uncertain space de la Campa describes between their culturally-defined political meanings and the artistry of Césaire’s own envisioning of them. Contemplating the border between knowledge and art, critic Joseph Khoury contends, “Césaire’s play becomes a kind of scrubbing cloth with which to clean up the layers of ideology imposed on *The Tempest*” (Khoury, 25); and with which to reboot A Tempest into a (rhyming) dialectic between Césaire and Shakespeare.

Khoury reads A Tempest in “unabashedly” Hegelian terms (Khoury, 23).<sup>2</sup> Caliban and Prospero’s relationship offers the most obvious allegory of Hegel’s slave-master relationship. “You and me. You and me. You-me...Me-you!” Prospero sputters at the end of the play (68). Simultaneously, Ariel and Caliban represent oppositional figures within the Black community; Ariel receives preferential treatment from the Whites on the play’s Island while Caliban does not. Consequently, Ariel is committed to a universal humanism while Caliban endorses revolution (28). More subtly, Khoury views Prospero not just in a dialectical relationship with Caliban, but with Caliban’s mother Sycorax, as well. “Hers is a black, female, coercive magic,” Khoury explains, “as opposed to Prospero’s, which is white, male and benevolent” (Khoury, 29). Though colonialism, class, and gender inform these three dualisms, ultimately portray a dialectics of race.

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<sup>2</sup> It bears noting that Hegel’s master-slave relationship is itself an allegorical figuration. Hegel’s use of the master and the slave reflects the historical moment in which he writes – a time when massive waves of support for abolition and wage labor swept through Western Europe. We can (*and do*) apply a similar historical analysis to A Tempest – political moment in which colonialism acted as a metaphor for slavery. Césaire merges Hegel’s allegorical rendering of the master-slave relationship with decolonizing rhetoric that pits the master-slave relationship as its own allegory of the relationship between European colonial powers and their colonies. Césaire, we might say, synthesizes these two allegories.

Let us examine the relationship between Prospero and Sycorax more closely. By “resurrecting” Sycroax, Césaire unseats Prospero’s claim of authority over the Island (Yoshino, 495). If Prospero has not truly conquered Sycorax, he has not truly conquered nature and his colonial mission has failed. Perhaps, as George Lamming notes, this is why Sycorax “arouses [Prospero] to rage that is almost insane” (Lamming, 115). The Duke’s memory of her, Lamming continues, “suggests an intimacy of involvement and concern which encourages speculation” (Lamming, 116). Césaire, like Lamming, reads between the lines.

The dialectical relationship between Prospero and Sycorax proves even more important when we remember that Ariel has taken on a human dimension in Césaire’s Tempest. A close reading of the relationship between Sycorax and Ariel reveals an important difference between Shakespeare’s and Césaire’s depictions. Both versions describe Sycorax’s arboreal imprisonment of Ariel. Too, both versions do so through Prospero’s recounting of the events to Ariel. In The Tempest,

[Sycorax] did confine thee,  
 By help of her more potent ministers  
 And in her most unmitigable rage,  
 Into a cloven pine; within which rift  
 Imprison'd thou didst painfully remain  
 A dozen years (I.ii.274-279).

In Shakespeare’s version, then, the subject Sycorax imposes her will on the object and inhuman Ariel.

In Césaire's rendering, on the other hand, Prospero remembers Ariel's confinement in decidedly different terms: "And who freed you from Sycorax, may I ask? Who rent the pine in which you had been imprisoned and brought you forth" (16)? Here, Prospero is the subject while Sycorax becomes the tree itself – the human Ariel was in Sycorax's tree. Caliban confirms Sycorax's xylology later in the play, reminiscing that his mother is, "in the gesture made by twisted root and its awaiting / thrust" (18).

Locating Sycorax in nature confirms Khoury's hypothesis of the dialectic of Prospero and Sycorax as the dialectic of civilization and nature. As Caliban later explains, "Prospero is the anti-Nature" (52). Conceiving of the relationship between Prospero and Sycorax as that of Civilization imposing itself upon Nature helps explain Prospero's victorious cry, "from a brutish monster I have made man" (63). To recap, the male character Prospero helps to situate the play as an allegory of colonialism imposing itself on the female character Sycorax who is an allegory of Nature. From this imposition of power, a 'mulatto' was brought forth from Sycorax. A Tempest not only illustrates colonialism as a master-slave dialectic, the play also reveals the resulting familial ties that emerge. In the context of these characters' humanness we realize that Prospero is Ariel's father. Miranda is his half-sister and Caliban is his half-brother. Prospero has acted the midwife while Sycorax gave birth to their son Ariel, who is born, we might conclude, following a caesarian section.

Or, as the author would have it, a *Césairean* section.

Ariel's lineage affects the dialectic between Caliban and Prospero, as well. "Without you?" Caliban yells at Prospero, "I'd be the king that's what I'd be, the King of the Island. The King of the Island given me by my mother Sycorax" (17). Although Ariel

is younger than Caliban, he stands to inherit the Island from Prospero when Prospero (and Miranda) return to Italy. As a 'mulatto' Ariel enjoys a racial privilege in comparison to the darker-skinned Caliban. Caliban performs manual labor, for instance, while Ariel does not. It seems difficult, then, to classify the relationship between Prospero and Ariel as dialectical. Rather, the two enjoy a tortured father-son connection that is constrained by the racial mores of colonial society. On the one hand, Prospero perhaps loves Ariel, even, and certainly favors him more than Caliban. That his only legitimate child is a woman possibly further fuels Prospero's affection for the male Ariel.

On the other hand, Prospero cannot acknowledge his fatherhood. Thus when Prospero eventually grants Ariel freedom and the latter wistfully complains, "I almost regret it. I might have turned into a real tree in the end"; Prospero is forced to snap back, "I don't like talking trees," (18). Both Ariel and Prospero no doubt fully appreciate the irony of the pun that links talking trees to family trees. Mediating between the Black Caliban and the White Prospero, the interracial Ariel contravenes Khoury's purely dialectical view of the Island, and instead reveals the illusion and constructedness of Race.

Despite the fact that Césaire along with many critics labels Caliban "Black", his race cannot be certain in either Shakespeare or Césaire's Tempest. While some like Steve Almquist suggests that Césaire "Africanizes" the "black slave", others do not read his play so neatly. Byrd explains, Caliban "exists in a liminal space between man and beast, food and cannibal, alive and dead Indian" (Byrd, 32). Citing the interaction between Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban in Césaire's Act II, Scene ii, Byrd locates the very first encounter between the three within the early-modern European commodification of the

‘Indian’ as an object for display. Writing of Shakespeare’s early-modern moment, we might recall Stephen Greenblatt’s description of “the legendary Wild Man” (Greenblatt, 21). Before racial theories became fixed in the European imaginary, Greenblatt reveals how Western Europeans envisioned a substantially less racialized or colorized Other onto which to project their colonial fantasies. For Césaire to flat out identify Caliban’s as a “Black slave” in the Characters List, however, confirms Charlotte Brumer’s analysis that Caliban “has suffered a sea change. Red to Black” (3, Brumer, 252).

Not only in terms of color, Caliban appears Africanized in his language, too. Almquist points foremost to Caliban’s invocation of *Uhuru*, the Swahili cry for Kenyan Independence (Almquist, 594, 587). Judith Sarnecki further explains, “the presence of Swahili and Yoruba words... disrupt the text in ways that intentionally corrupt the purity of the French language” in A Tempest by inserting non-French words that interrupt the prose of the play (Sarnecki, 281). That the Algerian-descended Caliban invokes words like *Uhuru* points to the word’s use as a signifier of Pan-African identity (Almquist, 588). *Uhuru* mirrors the contested definition of Caliban’s name, because allegory, as Johnson continues, is “the relation between any use of language and its linguistic or cultural past” (Johnson, 63). Caliban’s efforts to rework the French language reproduce Césaire’s efforts to rework Caliban.

Césaire’s usage of African vocabulary additionally responds to George Lamming’s structural analysis of The Tempest. Writing in 1960, Lamming glosses one of the plays most famous passages through a colonialist lens – “You taught me language and my only profit on’t / Is I know how to curse. A red plague rid you / For learning me your language” (I.ii.xxx). “This is the first important achievement of the colonizing process”

he offers, “speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue toward areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way” (Lamming, 109). That is, when Prospero introduces “language” to Caliban, he does so solely in order to express to Caliban his control. For Lamming, then, language is inherently tied to power. By offering pre-European, Africanized language, Césaire rejects Lamming’s view; instead he refuses to let Caliban’s identity be purely constructed by European discourse.

The question of Africanization rises once more in the context of the play’s setting. Many readers have generally assumed that Césaire’s *Tempest* takes place in Martinique. While many have pointed out that A Tempest “echoes” much of Césaire’s Notebook of Return to My Native Land, references to African plants and trees in *A Tempest* both rebuff and embrace a specificity of setting for the play (Regosin, 952; Almquist, 591). Writing nearly thirty years after the publication of Césaire’s Notebook, Joan Dayan claims that Césaire no longer writes specifically of Martinique, but of “the dual topography of Mediterranean and Atlantic, Old World and New” (Dayan, 141). By conflating Caliban’s and the Island’s indigenous and African geographical and linguistic markers of identity, Césaire continues to trouble the purity dialectic of race.

Not only does Césaire embrace the question surrounding Caliban’s Blackness, he challenges Prospero’s Whiteness as well. When Ferdinand first encounters Miranda and Prospero his swashbuckling tone effects how he addresses the former Duke and daughter by inflecting his speech with two geographically-specific assumptions:

Seeing the young lady, more beautiful than any wood-nymph, I might have been  
Ulysses on Nausicaa’s isle. But hearing you, sir, I now understand my fate a little

better...I see I have come ashore on the Barbary Coast and am in the hands of a cruel pirate (23).

Previously, Prospero and Miranda have gained power on the Island by policing racial difference and by setting themselves apart from the other inhabitants (Caliban, Sycorax and Ariel). Through the lens of the newcomer Ferdinand, however, the father-daughter combination is, if not Black, certainly not White. Homer's Nausicaa, we remember, is "gray-skinned". Further, what Europe considered the Barbary Coast generally reads as Arab, if not African (perhaps even Algeria, Sycorax's homeland). That Ferdinand cannot recognize the accent, skin color, dress and demeanor of fellow Napolitans, demonstrates Prospero and Miranda's difference from the European culture to whose authority they cling on the Island. As much as the two rely on their European ancestry, their residency on the Island has permanently altered them.

One might even say they have gone native.

### **Deconstructing Audience**

We turn, then, to the Prologue in which a Master of Ceremonies assigns masks to the actors on stage. Césaire subtitles the play *adaptation pour un théâtre nègre* (adaptation for a Black Theatre), and this could very well imply an all-Black cast. Given the complexities of race in the play and in the Caribbean, however, one imagines A Tempest's director facing a tough decision about the masks. What color should they be? Are Prospero's and Miranda's White? Is Caliban's Black? What about Ariel? What color is Mulatto, anyway? Assuming, however, that Black actors on stage wear White masks to

represent the European characters, we find that Césaire literalizes the title of Frantz Fanon's canonical book Black Skin, White Masks.

The masks themselves prove vital in the context of performance. The suggestion of several critics that Césaire employs a type of Brechtian social realism begins with the performance of the play as a play. "By clearly separating the character's identity from the gesture of its performance", offers Timothy Scheie, "Césaire's desired staging falls squarely in the tradition of Brecht's theater of alienation" (Scheie, 22). For Scheie, Césaire's goal is to expose the constructedness of race to his audience (Scheie, 23). By equating race with masks, Césaire seeks to reveal that both one's mask and one's race is performative.

Laurence Porter locates Césaire even more firmly in the Brecht column, explaining, "theater made Césaire's statements accessible to even the illiterate" (Porter, 362). And theater critic Seth Wolitz found after a performance in 1969, "the theater of Césaire... is *théâtre engagé*, the socialist realist epic theater of the Left, the cultural manifestation of Negritude" (Wolitz, 197). For a variety of critics, certainly, A Tempest like *The Tempest* is meant to be performed. The question is, however, performed for whom? For the aforementioned critics, Césaire writes to the masses, a curious coalescence of viewers who might be Black, poor or somehow always-already both.

Indeed, Césaire exists dually for Brechtians as a member of the racially-oppressed masses, and yet simultaneously as an intellectual writing for these very same masses. The dialectical Khoury attempts to grapple with this issue by suggesting "Shakespeare was problematizing the colonizer/colonized relationship for his strictly English (i.e. colonizer) audience, while Césaire was writing for both colonizers and the colonized" (Khoury, 23).



Allusions to Shelley, Greek myth, Baudelaire, surrealism and contemporary existentialism back up Khoury's claim that Césaire does not write merely to Porter's 'illiterate' masses. Césaire's positioning within and between European, African (and American and Caribbean canons), instead exemplifies what Gayatri Spivak defines as "the intellectual within socialized capital, brandishing concrete experience [that] can help consolidate the international division of labor" (Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 69). Césaire exposes structures of race and class using Brechtian theatrical techniques but not the Brechtian ideology of didacticism.

Certainly the play is not purely socially realist. Consider, for instance Jean Franco's conclusion regarding the origins of magical realism. Latin American writers recognized, "the stubborn intransigence of race and gender difference that could not be [without], a leap over the dualisms of Hegelian philosophy in order to take risks" (Franco, 14). In an interview after the play's publication Césaire recounts, "I was a surrealist without even realizing it" (Palcy). Stopping short of labeling A Tempest magically realist or surrealist, it does behoove us to recognize that Césaire appropriates socially realist techniques in the same way that he takes on Shakespearean drama and Hegelian philosophy. Césaire does not write socially realist theater for a tangled and tentatively defined masses, but for all readers. Césaire constantly and simultaneously writes for different audiences and different registers. Just as he contaminates genre, and race, he contaminates how we imagine his publics and their receptions of his efforts.

One of the publics Césaire addresses, though, must be third-world intellectuals. Revisiting the dialectic between Caliban and Ariel, Byrd and Almquist among others remind us of the direct allusions to Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. in A Tempest.

Although ironically Malcolm X had a White, Scottish grandfather and was often nicknamed “Red” because of his red hair, in A Tempest, the darker-skinned Caliban identifies with Malcolm X while the lighter-skinned Ariel adapts the rhetoric of the pacific King. “Call me X”, Caliban demands, “like a man without a name. Or to be more precise, a man whose name has been stolen” (20). “I’ve often had this inspiring, uplifting dream”, Ariel counters, “we would all three like brothers set out to build a wonderful world” (27). The conversation between the urgency of the proletarian Caliban and the gradualism of the elite Ariel provides a distinct forum for encouraging a third-world intellectual audience to march toward the former away from the latter; because Caliban, to be sure, gets the best of these encounters.

Parodying the Christian idealism of Ariel’s faith in Prospero’s ‘conscience’, Caliban notes, “someone strikes you on the right cheek and you offer the left. Someone kicks you on the left buttock and you offer the right” (27). Rejecting Ariel’s placating and protracted efforts, Caliban demands his freedom immediately. The ‘black slave’ then laughs in the face of Ariel’s plea to help Prospero grow a conscience. “You might as well ask a stone to grow flowers”, he taunts (27). The reference to Jesus’ parable of the sower in which the seed could not sustain growth because it was in stone rather than fertile soil mocks Ariel’s idealism that Prospero would ever voluntarily surrender his Power over the Island.

Prospero is the anti-Nature, remember, he is not fertile soil. The stony soil also contrasts with the ‘African flora’ that peoples the play’s Island. Caliban’s aggressive and funny tone contrasts favorably with Ariel’s resignation and passiveness. Their debate in II.i recalls the many radio and television debates between Malcolm X and more

conservative Integrationist Black leaders from which Malcolm often came away a winner (Marable, 190). In these forums Malcolm X took the opportunity not only to debate his opponent, but also to address the general American public – Black, White, Northern, Southern, Liberal, Conservative. The speakers’ sense of multiple audiences reflects Césaire’s similar sense of audience in A Tempest.

There is little surprise as Ariel’s character becomes less favorable over the course of the play, especially when we consider James Arnold’s analysis that the human Ariel also embodies Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks (Arnold, 245). This is truly apparent near the end of A Tempest when Prospero finally grants Ariel freedom. *Comme ivre* (“As if drunk”), Ariel revels in his new status by immediately putting himself into opposition with still-slaves. Dropping the universal humanism of King, Ariel creepily pronounces,

I shall be the thrush that launches  
its mocking cry  
to the benighted field hand,  
‘Dig Nigger, Dig Nigger’ (58)<sup>3</sup>

Ariel’s startling revelation illustrates what Joan Dayan has termed the play’s “slippery...caprices of power” (Dayan, 151). Rewarded for years of wearing the White mask, Ariel, it seems, cannot take that mask off. Instead, as Fredric Jameson explains in another context,

it was not difficult to identify an adversary who spoke another language and wore the visible trappings of colonial occupation. When those are replaced by your own people, the connections to external controlling forces are much more difficult to

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<sup>3</sup> Césaire’s French text says “nègre” here, the same word used in the play’s subtitle – “adaptation pour un théâtre nègre”, although the venom with which Ariel reports this line seems to support Miller’s translation.

represent. The newer leaders may of course throw off their masks and reveal the person of the Dictator...but this moment also determines problems of representation. (Jameson, 81-2)

Having abandoned the metaphor of King-Malcolm X, Ariel's ascension to Prospero's position of power preserves the Island's class dynamics by substituting Ariel for Prospero as Caliban's opposite. Moreover, the rise of Ariel-the-oppressor troubles what Rob Nixon helpfully defines as "a pervasive mood of optimistic outrage" in decolonizing African and Caribbean countries in the 1960s (Nixon, 557). Césaire does not end the play on this note, but Ariel's impending participation in the continuation of the Island's soon-to-be 'post'-colonial structures of inequality sadly proves not only pessimistic, but prophetic as well: certainly, at least for Césaire's own "Department" of Martinique.

### **Deconstructing Masculinity**

Fanon's masks occur again in the play, this time at the party Prospero gives in honor of Ferdinand and Miranda's engagement (Nixon, 572; Césaire, 47-49). Césaire, reworks Iris and Ceres' blessing at the party in IV.i of The Tempest. In French, the word for such a party is *masque*. The presence of the "black devil-god" Eshu, however, interrupts the gathering of people wearing White masks at the *masque* where he pointedly discomfits the White female spirits with references to sex and his penis.

In doing so, Césaire forces a recalculation of the power dynamics among the play's characters by appropriating the history of Blackface performance and minstrelsy to write Black masculinity on his own terms. The highly masculine Eshu parodies what Eric

Lott describes as “minstrelsy’s mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation” of the Black male body (Lott, 6). Returning to Brecht, we find, “the people can only take over their cultural heritage by an act of appropriation” (Brecht, 85). By appropriating Black face and racist depictions of Black men, Césaire seeks to recuperate the Black male body; specifically, even, Fanon’s: “my body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning” (Fanon, 113).

In recognizing Eshu as the Black, male unconscious, Césaire’s caricature exposes the underlying excuses for fear of Black masculinity in the colonial imaginary. Octave Mannoni, of all people, suggests that,

The ‘inferior being’ always serves as scapegoat; our own evil intentions can be projected on to him. This applies especially to incestuous intentions; Miranda is the only woman on the island, and Prospero and Caliban the only men. It is easy to see why it is always his daughter or his sister or his neighbour’s wife (never his own) whom a man imagines to have been violated by a negro; he wants to rid himself of guilt by putting the blame for his bad thoughts on someone else (Mannoni, 106).

Although Mannoni does not recognize it, his analysis points to universal truths about the connection between colonialism and gender. “Rape stories tend to emerge at moments of political instability”, Jenny Sharpe elaborates (Sharpe, 7). In moments of colonial tension, colonial authorities attempt to justify their continuing colonial project in the guise of protection for white women.

Uncomfortably, Césaire not only parodies this logic but also appropriates it. “Caliban’s attempted rape of Miranda”, Meredith Skura argues, “can be seen as an

expression not merely of sexual but also of territorial lust, understandable in its context” (Skura, 44). Fanon, too, we remember, speaks to this: “Between these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become mine” (Fanon, 45). In deconstructing race on the Island, Césaire imbues Caliban and Eshu with power – power that is entirely gendered.

Finally, Césaire masculinizes the play’s atmosphere. His stage directions indicate “the ambience of a psychodrama”. On the stage, in contrast to the light comedic tone that was The Tempest, Césaire’s play, in the words of one theater reviewer, works a trick whereby “organic levels of metaphoric and thematic complexity recede” (Regosin, 952). The Prologue’s seemingly impromptu gathering of actors instead provides the audience a heuristic prism for understanding race. As all of the actors try on or are assigned masks, Césaire’s metatheatricality invites the audience to question their own racial performance. *What mask do you wear?* In this sense, *A Tempest* resembles popular post-World War II French existential theater, novels, films and art (Scheie, 26). When Caliban sings “FREEDOM HI-DAY! FREEDOM HI-DAY!” at the end of the play he exhibits a powerful sense of psychological freedom (66).<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the play psychological freedom manifests itself in Prospero now being dependent on Caliban. Despite the former’s bluster, he is fully beholden to Caliban’s generosity. “Cold on this island...Have to think about making a fire”, Prospero shivers (65). Yet it is Caliban, remember, who gathers wood on the Island and who now holds the power to decide whether Prospero should live comfortably. Césaire, here, takes a final opportunity to ridicule one of Mannoni’s major claims, “the colonial’s personality

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<sup>4</sup> Consider the ending to Jean-Paul Sartre’s Dirty Hands, for instance, as Hugo chooses suicide by cop as a liberatory tactic. As we will see in a moment, Caliban’s shout of “Better death than humiliation and injustice” echoes Hugo’s cry.

is wholly unaffected by that of the native of the colony to which he goes; it does not adapt itself, but develops solely in accordance with its own inner structure”

(Mannoni, 108). Instead, Prospero is clearly affected, indeed entirely affected, by his relationship to Caliban, and it is perhaps this fact more than any that liberates the “black slave”.

“Better death than humiliation and injustice”, Caliban resolutely declares (28). Nearly this exact same language of existentialism also appears in Ferdinand’s first encounter with Prospero and Miranda. “A gentleman prefers death before dishonor”, he shouts upon reasoning that Prospero is a Barbary pirate. The similarity between Caliban’s and Ferdinand’s morbid proclamations furthers the play’s decidedly masculine impulse. Thus despite the allegorical kinship Césaire posits among Caliban, Ariel (and Miranda), Caliban’s discourse most closely aligns with the foreign Ferdinand.

In writing such a masculine text, however, Césaire omits Sycorax from Caliban’s existential gains. Caliban and Ariel’s mother does not even have a discourse, much less a masculine or feminine one. Her body is not recuperated the same way Caliban and Ariel’s are. Instead, Césaire redefines Sycorax as all of nature. She is, “kind and gentle in a word”, sure, but with less agency even than Shakespeare envisioned her (52). Not only has Césaire shifted Sycorax from Ariel’s prisoner to Ariel’s prison itself, in A Tempest Sycorax cannot even feel the human emotion of “envy” (I.ii. 256-259). Thus Sycorax also exists as a metonymy; not of centuries of critics’ mapping meaning onto her body, however, but rather of critics mapping her body onto the Island for which she stands in. “My mouth will be the mouth of those who have no mouth”, Césaire wrote in his

*Notebook* – after all, Sycorax, “the subaltern [,] cannot speak” (Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* 104).

“Between patriarchy and imperialism”, Gayatri Spivak continues, “the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ (Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* 102). “The utopian promise of regeneration incarnated in the feminine”, explains one critic, “can only come about through the magical reenchantment of the land” (Franco, 171). In my next chapter I will explore Maryse Condé’s allegories of black women and situate her writing in a wave of third world feminists’ response to the literary imbrication of women of color between patriarchy and imperialism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In *A Tempest*, however, Césaire’s ambitious and highly successful construction of the figures of colonization, decolonization and postcolonialism fails to consider, humanize and re-animate black women. In a play that articulates the racial confusions, boundaries and bonds of an Island’s society while appealing to numerous audiences Césaire lack of articulation and appeal to the role of women on the Island sets the stage for our subsequent understandings of novels like *I, Tituba*.



*Chapter II: Allegory Gendered Female in I, Tituba*

*What is sex if not a big joke? – Nella Larsen's Passing*

In contrast to Césaire's employment of allegory in the service of revitalizing the Black male body, Maryse Condé's I, Tituba...Black Witch of Salem (I, Tituba), utilizes allegory in the revalorization of the Black female body in the Caribbean. Written in 1986, a moment of vast cultural production centering on the intersection of gender and race in the third-world, I suggest that we read Condé's novel as an archetypal text in the Caribbean. While we might not read I, Tituba as a response to *A Tempest*, I suggest we instead read it as a statement of identity politics for Black women in the Caribbean in its historical moment. As Barbara Johnson notes, identity politics is "the translation of the structure of allegory into the reconstruction of the social text" (Johnson, 71). By shifting the site of allegorical focus from the male to female body, I, Tituba provides an opportunity to study the reclamation of allegory in Condé's work, and to understand how she situates that as a response to what she sees as prototypical Caribbean literature. In shifting allegory from male to female, Condé emphasizes "Operative metaphors of national belonging that encode a semantic collapse between women and (mother)land" (Deloughrey, 5).

Condé's writing exists in a moment of bidirectional critique of identity politics movements. She alternatively embraces yet critiques Negritude and second wave feminism.<sup>5</sup> Both of these movements accreted significantly in the two decades between *A*

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<sup>5</sup> I am tepidly using "second wave feminism" and "first world feminism" throughout this chapter. Generally speaking we would categorize the former as a subset of the latter, and I have tried to use "second

*Tempest* and *I, Tituba*. Condé's novel then, may be said to be "mercilessly parodying the very (received) notion of feminist rewriting", while at the same time, "reproaching negritude for...having preached a false solidarity of black people" (Smith, 603; Nyatetu-Waigwa, 554). Situating the novel three centuries prior to its publication, offers a "consciously anachronistic response" to the elision of women of color in both first world feminist and third world cultural national movements (Bécel,613).

While on the one hand Black women have been excluded from political discourse and representation, Negritude and second wave feminism have also created constricting archetypes of the Black woman. She "assumes a function of initiatory and mythical vitalism" explains Nara Araujo (Araujo, 225). Chandra Mohanty refers to this homogenizing process within first world feminist discourse as "the production of...third-world difference" by which "first world feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities" of third-world women (Mohanty, 63). Wangari Wa Nyatetu-Waigwa (and later Condé herself, as we shall see) criticizes Negritude for a similar process of "having portrayed Africa as the motherland for all black people" (Nyatetu-Waigwa, 554). The late 1980s, then, presents Condé with the opportunity not just to be heard as the sub-altern between patriarchy and imperialism, but also with the opportunity to redefine the narrative surrounding the Black woman's body.

Labeling the novel as simply a bidirectional response to Negritude and second wave feminism, however, ignores Condé's response to much earlier claims made upon and against the body of the Black woman. Jennifer Morgan traces the role of travel narratives in defining the Black female body in the European imaginary as both beautiful

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wave feminism" to refer to a historical movement occurring in the twentieth century and "first world feminism" as an ongoing ideological production.

and monstrous. African and Amerindian women's bodies were described as having enormous breasts<sup>6</sup> – a technique that merges European male desire with a racialized process of Othering. More importantly, continues Morgan, “monstrous bodies symbolized [black women's] sole utility – their ability to produce both crops and other laborers” (Morgan, 168). This very early yet persistent rhetoric of colonialism brands Black women as incredibly fertile. Condé's *Tituba* reappropriates these stereotypes that surround the Black woman's body and embraces them in such a way that allows Tituba significant agency throughout the text.

So who exactly was Tituba? And who exactly *is* Tituba? Though featured in literary works like Ann Petry's *Tituba of Salem Village*, and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, unlike Caliban, Tituba was a “real” person arrested and put on trial for witchcraft in Salem in the late eighteenth century. Much historical evidence points to Tituba's race as American Indian, from the Aeroac tribe of what is now French Guiana (Breslaw, 2). Such racial assignation, however, will always be shrouded in a cloak of mystery. Like Caliban, Tituba's race is much more determined by centuries of allegorical portrayals, rather than her own genealogical heritage.

On the one hand, historian Elaine Breslaw points out, “all extant Massachusetts references to her clearly specify that she was an American Indian” (Breslaw, 12). Breslaw makes convincing arguments based on the history of slavery in Barbados. She acknowledges, however, that determining Tituba's race relies on secondary and at times tertiary evidence found in the reports of colonial records. One of the extant documents Breslaw references appears in the novel. Tituba's testimony during her trial for witchcraft

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<sup>6</sup> Hence the title of Morgan's wonderful article, “Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulders”.

labels her “Tituba Indian”. Condé has cleverly refigured this dilemma, however, by painting Indian as the name Tituba has taken from her husband – John Indian, rather than as a marker of her racial identity.

Angela Davis speaks in stronger terms. “There are those who dispute [Tituba’s] African descent”, Davis writes, “perhaps hoping to stir up enmity between Black and Native American women as we seek to recreate our respective histories” (Davis, xiii). For Davis, the Tituba that Condé has created stays true to both the historical person of Tituba as well as the historical memory of Black women slaves. I, Tituba, then, “should be read not primarily as a counter-text to an historical lacuna, but rather as a text that conceptualizes Tituba as [an] effaced and unacknowledged presence” (Dukats, 54). Tituba fits into Condé’s desire to represent the repressed story of a “Caribbean woman of African descent” (Davis, xiii).

Thus, Tituba’s conception and ancestors are revealed in the very first sentences of the novel. As Jeannie Suk has pointed out, however, the first sentence’s subjectivity immediately shifts. Rather than introducing a predicate, the sentence instead introduces a new subject:

Abena, ma mère, un marin anglais la viola sur le pont du *Christ the King* un jour de 16\*\* alors que le navire faisait voile vers la Barbade. (Condé, *Moi, Tituba*, 15)

(Abena, my mother, an English sailor raped her on the deck of *Christ the King* one day in 16\*\* as that vessel sailed toward Barbados [my translation])

By suddenly shifting the agency of the sentence away from Tituba, Condé reproduces the power dynamic on the ship. “In the process of shifting from subject to object”, Suk writes, “the process of grammatical decoding coincides with her rape” (Suk, 121). Abena

no longer has a name, or identity but is instead the French pronoun *la* – ‘her’. The rapid shift between subject and object, moreover, disjoins the entire sentence. To employ this shift while still constructing a grammatically complete sentence requires the two quick commas after ‘Abena’, and ‘ma mère’, respectively. These commas impede the flow and expected route of the novel’s prose and lead to Abena being, “disabled by syntactic choices in a text” (Millis, 145).

Abena’s displacement from the agency of the sentence recalls the metonymy of Césaire’s agency-less Sycorax. Unlike Césaire’s substitution of a literary character for an entire Island, however, Abena’s slippage between subject and object forces us to recognize the complexity of the portrayal of the Black woman in literature. Ironically, the instability of Abena’s position in the sentence compels the reader to recognize that her construction “would not be defined as a substitution but as a particular type of combination” (De Man, 6). The very illegibility of Abena’s position renders her an allegory not a metonymy. We are reminded once more of Gayatri Spivak’s dictum; “the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’” (Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* 102). Abena’s disappearance from the subject of the sentence, then, engenders the complexity of allegorical figurations that Césaire does not impart to his female characters.

Returning to the novel itself, we can read Tituba not just as the child of an English sailor’s rape of an African slave; not just as a child of the metaphor of colonial violence; but we can also read her as the child of rhetorical figuration, disfiguration and violence. “It is from this act of aggression that I was born. From this act of hatred and contempt”

(15, my translation). Barbara Johnson further sheds light; “to read ‘allegorically’ was to uncover both the historical ancestors and the linguistic determinations” of a text (Johnson, 67). Tituba’s historical ancestors and linguistic determinations are one and the same. We can apply a similar analysis to the novel’s title although with much more complex results. Condé’s French title also employs the appositive and reads *Moi, Tituba, sorcière...Noire de Salem*. The syntax of *I, Tituba* and *Moi, Tituba, sorcière* reflects a similar, although reversed process of translation for the Robert Graves novel, *I, Claudius*. In French, the title reads *Moi, Claude, empereur*. In substituting Tituba for Claudius, Condé imbues her protagonist with the aura of a Roman emperor, albeit one who suffered mightily.

The second parts of both titles also offer ambivalent interpretations. In particular, the meaning of the French word *Noire* presents varying possibilities for the title. On the one hand, *Noire* might refer to Tituba and signify ownership and possession: Tituba, the Black witch, is owned by Salem collectively. On the other hand, *Noire* might be construed as darkness or blackness. In this case, rather than possessing the *Noire*, the *Noire* is visited upon the town of Salem. I suggest that both interpretations are correct and demonstrate the way Condé, from the very beginning reconstructs the relationship between Blackness and the female body.

### **Exotic Poets**

A year after the publication of the novel’s English translation, Maryse Condé writes “Order, Disorder, and Freedom and the West Indian Writer”, a critique of all West

Indian literature. In it, Condé characterizes a “malaise” within the canon of West Indian literature; attributable to a desire to reproduce the works of Jacques Romain and of course Aimé Césaire. Condé finds that these men created “messianic male heroes...whose ambition is to change their societies and thus rehabilitate the exploited Black Man” (Condé, 125).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the problem with holding up their work as a template for future writing, Condé contends, is that such writing is overly reliant on the logic of Marxist structuralist conceptions of the Caribbean (Condé, 118).

In response, Condé champions “exotic poets” – poets she differentiates from Césaire whom she accuses of viewing the Caribbean as “a paradise perverted by Europe” (Condé, 123-4). It is the pure dialectic between pre-colonial purity and post-colonial ecological degradation that Condé rejects. In *I, Tituba*, the main character stakes out her own paradise that is neither over-determined by colonial exploitation nor a signifier of pre-colonial innocence. Rather she imbues her novel with motifs of motherhood and fertility.

In contrast, Condé’s reappropriation of the term “exotic” invites a certain sense of irony. For her, the term alludes to early twentieth century West Indian writers who eschewed the seemingly / masculine aesthetic of defining the Caribbean through the lens of Marxist ideology (Condé, 123). On the other hand, “exotic” bears all the connotations of centuries of colonialist rhetoric that identifies new worlds as strange and Other. As Richard Grove points out, “the notion that the garden and rivers of Eden might be discovered in the East was a very ancient one” (Grove, 3). Indeed, when Tituba finds a home “on the edge of the River Ormond where nobody ever went because the soil was

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<sup>7</sup> References to the novel will only include page numbers, but references to “Order, Disorder, and Freedom and the West Indian Writer” will include Condé’s name.

marshy and not suitable for growing sugarcane” (10-11), she plays on the trope of the deserted island. What’s more, Tituba’s home away from the plantation represents her own Eden, “these were the happiest moments of my life”, she says (11).

Tituba’s garden acts as a place of becoming, a womb, a place of creating life. “I attempted bold hybrids”, she writes,

Crossbreeding the *passiflorinde* with the *prune taurreau*, the poisonous *pomme cythere* with the *surette*, and the *azalée des azalées* with the *persulfereuse*. I

devised drugs and potions whose powers I strengthened with incantations (11).

As she grows and nurtures life – connecting and collating the diverse and various ingredients into a coherent narrative – Tituba, the gardener, exists as an allegory for exotic poets. Unlike the rhetoric of purity and virginity in colonial discourse, however, Tituba’s ‘crossbreeding’ illustrates what Condé views as a type of hybridity and sophistication that contravenes the structuralist dialectic of colonialism. As Tituba plants and sows, her gardening acts out the creation of hybridity. Tituba, herself the product of ‘crossbreeding’, exerts her own agency in reclaiming the allegory of *métissage* by refashioning the violence of the colonial encounter on her own, nonviolent, terms. Tituba becomes the creator, not the created.

Gayatri Spivak criticizes this mode of writing and refers to it as “an enabling violation” (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 371). Framing colonialism through the lens of rape, she warns, “shields the new imperialism of exploitation as development” (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 371) and endorses a sense of the ends justifying the means. Spivak’s criticism proves useful to the extent that we read Condé’s literature as a justification for colonialism, instead of reading “rape as a



foundational act in women's lives" (Manzor-Coates, 739). Tituba does not celebrate herself or whom she has become, but rather she celebrates and redefines the process of creation itself.

### **Fertility**

I suggest, then, that we read Tituba's gardening as a response to her own origin. "The masculine nomad achieves mobility" Deloughrey reminds us, "precisely through the erasure of a women's corporeal, ontological and economic capacity for reproduction" (Deloughrey, 5). By controlling both her and the plants' means of reproduction, Tituba acts out her own conception, but in a way that emphasizes her continued presence and agency.

The positioning of Tituba's conception at the absolute beginning of the novel subverts the structural allegory of rape as colonialism. "A thing must be conquered absolutely, cutting off all possibility of revenge, only when that thing is placed inside the body and annihilated there" Teskey explains (Teskey, 155). Because Abena's rape begins at the very opening of the novel, however, she is not 'conquered absolutely' by the White sailor. Teskey's analysis might describe Abena's impregnation, as well, but the key difference is that Tituba is not 'annihilated' in Abena's womb. The entire novel, then, should be read as a testament to Tituba's sense of survival and of her appropriation of the enabling violation.

By privileging this reconception of her birth, I, Tituba feminizes exotic poets. "They were celebrating their land *before* celebrating their peoples. Not *instead* of doing

so,” Condé explains (Condé, 123). Implicit in Condé’s argument is the always-already femininity of the land. Conversely, the ‘peoples’ Condé speaks of are in some sense always-already gendered male. If the land is feminine and peoples are masculine, then, we might decode Condé’s defense of exotic poets as one that celebrates both men and women – but celebrates women *first*.

Though the novel’s attending glossary tells us that several of Tituba’s plants are, in fact, “a literary invention by the author”, one of the fruits in Tituba’s women-first garden alludes to the poem *Sainte Lucie* by Derek Walcott (185). “Pomme arac, / otaheite apple, / pomme cythère, / Pomme granate” Walcott writes (II -1-4). Walcott’s poem relates his experience mixing English, French and Saint Lucian Creole in his childhood. Tituba’s ‘crossbreeding’ of plants and fruits reflects Walcott’s linguistic crossbreeding in his poetry. Condé’s reference to this poem identifies Walcott as an exotic poet.

As Tituba plants the pomme cythère in her garden, Condé plays on the fruit’s many meanings to deconstruct the classic myth of the Biblical garden of Eden. Etymologically, a *pomme* is an apple while *cythère* might translate as Cytherean – of or relating to the birthplace of the goddess Venus (OED). Condé, then, reworks the meaning of the forbidden fruit by investing it with the qualities of the Greek goddess of fertility. For Tituba, the pomme cythère – the fruit of the tree of good and evil – is not poisoned, it is instead the harbinger of a different type of genesis. By refashioning the apple as a talisman of fertility and juvenation instead of forbidden sin, Tituba acts out her own creation story and exerts the agency that Abena and she lacked on the ship. She shifts her positionality from creator to created.

### **Bridgetown and Belleplaine**

All of this happens in the first chapter of the novel. Tituba is created, born, and lives in her Edenic garden. We might consider the second chapter of the novel, then, a type of Exodus story. She meets John Indian at the very beginning of Chapter two and he offers a decidedly different forbidden fruit (19).

Two of Tituba's lovers, her husband John Indian, and later the leader of the Maroons Christophe, offer allegories of two types of masculinity Condé perceives in the Black community. On the one hand, John Indian evokes Césaire's Ariel as he constantly dissembles in front of Whites and earns a privileged status. On the other hand, Christopher lives in complete separation from Whites in Barbados and imposes patriarchy on the maroon community in his own way. By resisting both men, Tituba exhibits her agency in refusing to stay submissive to either of them.

John Indian dismisses and disparages Tituba's magical powers. He tries to convert her to Christianity and refuses to "live in that rabbit hutch of yours up in the woods" (17). Rather, John Indian prefers his slave cabin in Bridgetown (18). The reference to the city of Bridgetown speaks to his objections to the garden where Tituba lived in that it represents the urban and modern opposition to Tituba's home away from the plantation.

Like Césaire, Condé alludes to Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks. In the character of John Indian, Condé exposes two sides of the title. John Indian performs for his mistress and slave owner in Barbados, "in a whining, humble voice like a child asking for a favor" (21). Later in Salem, John Indian dissembles throughout the community "I wear a mask, my tormented wife", John Indian explains to Tituba,

Painted the colors they want. Red, bulging eyes? ‘Yes Massa!’ Thick, black lips? ‘Yes Missy!’ The nose flattened like a toad? ‘At your service, ladies and gentlemen!’ And behind all that, I, John Indian, am free (74).

The irony of proclaiming his freedom foreshadows Tituba’s impending imprisonment in Salem. John Indian’s willingness to masquerade and trade in stereotypes leaves Tituba dissatisfied with her husband and his methods for achieving a privileged status.

Earlier in Barbados, however, John Indian transfers the concept of the mask to Tituba. “ ‘My friends will think you’re condescending. They’ll say your skin is black, but you’re wearing a white mask over it’ ”, he complains, at a party (*a masque*) (32). For John Indian, acting out Black stereotypes is a survival strategy, but he accuses Tituba of acting out the apparently White stereotype of aloofness. “The color of John Indian’s skin had not caused him half the trouble it had caused me”, Tituba concludes.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Christopher, the leader of the Maroons, demands of Tituba, “I want you to make me invincible” (146). While John Indian rejects or ignores Tituba’s witchly qualities, Christopher insists on them. The maroon leader reinscribes the identification of women with magic. When he finds that Tituba does not produce invincibility on demand, he retreats. After Tituba asks to fight alongside the other maroons, Christopher responds, “A woman’s duty, Tituba, is not to fight or make war, but to make love” (151). Less than a month later, Tituba leaves Maroons’ camp in Belleplaine with disillusion in her heart. Explains Jamila Khader of this situation,

Women remain alienated and estranged not only from their metropolitan homes, as a result of colonization and racism, but also from their originary Caribbean

homes, as a result of nationalist ideologies, patriarchal oppression, poverty, and other personal traumatic experiences (Khader, 63).

While John Indian and Christopher find value in subduing and recruiting Tituba, Tituba in turn sees these men mainly as objects of sexual desire. “I must confess it was downright hypocritical of me...I knew all too well where his main asset lay and I dared not look below the jute cord that held up his shorts”, Tituba explains of her desire for John Indian (19). Years later when contemplating Christopher, Tituba speaks with her mother’s spirit,

“Can’t I try to help him” I insisted. “He’s fighting for a noble cause” Abena, my mother, burst out laughing. “Hypocrite! Is it the cause he’s fighting for that interests you? Come now” (146)!

Tituba, “a powerfully sexual being” finds significant agency in her sexuality and desire” (Davis, xii).

## **Prison**

Tituba returns to motifs of creation and fertility later in the novel. Following the arc of Tituba’s life, Condé details her time in Salem, where their owner Samuel Parris has taken John Indian and her. Jailed on suspicion of witchcraft, Tituba’s cellmate is Hester Prynne. Prynne, the protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter, has been incarcerated because of her affair with the Rev. Dimmesdale, and instantly strikes up a friendship with Tituba.

In their shared cell, Hester does most of the talking. Partly joking, she says to Tituba, “I’d like to write a book where I’d describe a model society governed by women! We would give our names to our children, we would raise them alone” (101). Hester’s envisioned utopia rings hollow to Tituba in different ways although she chooses to respond with criticism veiled as a joke. “We couldn’t make [children] alone, even so” she reminds Hester.

While Tituba’s teasing responds to the strictness of Hester’s “model society”, it also responds to Spivak’s criticism of the enabling violation. Condé refuses to acknowledge the enabling violation, her own birth included, as the only method of creation. Instead, she paints her own utopia, first in her garden and later in this discussion with Hester in which women decide when, where and with whom they will reproduce. Although neither Hester nor Tituba seem completely serious, Tituba’s agency in choosing her sexual partners reproduces her positionality as a gardener. Rather than colonialism producing hybridity in the name of “development”, Tituba produces hybridity as a means of reproducing yet deconstructing her own birth.

The conversations between Tituba and Hester offer an allegory of the discursive relationship between white / first world women and black / third world women in the historical moment in which Condé writes. On the one hand, Tituba and Hester are both oppressed by Salem’s patriarchal religion and government, while on the other hand Tituba is affected and punished in different ways than Hester. Moreover, Hester chooses the topics of conversation and simultaneously ignores her own racial privilege while exoticizing Tituba’s racial status. Still, the two women develop a deep bond, albeit one that exposes Hester’s well-intentioned elisions of Tituba’s story.

Most notably, Hester speaks in the vocative tense.

Don't call me mistress (95)

You cannot have done evil, Tituba!

[My unborn daughter] wants you to tell her a story...Make her happy, Tituba (98)

Do tell me! (99)

Make them scared, Tituba! (99)

Give them their money's worth! (99)

Describe [the devil] as a billygoat with an eagle's beak for a nose... (100)

Let them tremble, let them quake and swoon (99)

Let them dance to the sound of his flute (99)

Tell them about the witches' meetings (100)

What does it matter to you? Describe it! (100)

Oh, yes, do that! (100)

Don't forget he has more than one disguise up his sleeve (100)

Don't talk to me about your wretched husband! (100)

Be quiet! (101)

The frequency of exclamation points only further drives home Hester's rhetorical power in the relationship. Hester is the speaker, the commander and the subject, Tituba is the listener and the object.

Still, as we see, Hester's commands do not appear ill-intentioned. Instead, Hester exoticizes Tituba's origin story, reducing it to a children's tale when she asks Tituba to tell a story "about your country" for the benefit of Hester's unborn child (98). Tituba happily retells her past, but in the form of a fictionalized story. Unlike Milton – who,

despite his maleness Hester admires – Tituba is assigned the qualities of magic and foreignness (101). As Tituba explains, story-telling in itself is a “beloved ritual” (100). For Hester, on the other hand, story-telling takes the form of canonical western literature. “Oh, I forgot you don’t know how to read”, Hester muses and in so doing, dismisses Tituba’s participation in understanding, let alone creating, literature (101). Hester seems to find a stronger sense of communion with a white male author than with her black woman cellmate.

Thus when Tituba refrains from admitting that the bedtime story she tells is indeed her own, she resists Hester’s attempts to deny the literariness of the story itself. Although the plot of the story mirrors Tituba’s life, she locates the story in a different temporal and geographical location than Barbados. By not disclosing to Hester that the story defines her life, Tituba refuses to concede to Fredric Jameson’s claim that “all third-world texts are necessarily...allegorical” (Jameson, 69). That Tituba chooses not to identify herself with the text points to her agency in defining the borders between the fictional and the historical. Tituba does not let Hester define which is which.

Yet Tituba and Hester have much in common. Like John Indian, Hester’s beloved has more freedom than she. “While I am rotting here the man who put this child in my womb is free to come and go as he pleases”, she complains (97). John Indian, as we have seen, visits Tituba, although his freedom galls her.

Tituba and Hester both experienced abortions. Hester reveals that she has had four, although Tituba notices that the pride she appears to take in revealing this information belies a deeper sadness (97). “‘I, too, killed my child,’ I whispered to myself”, Tituba remembers (98). Indeed, as Hester hangs herself rather than face the



beginning of her branded life in The Scarlet Letter, she induces abortion number five, taking Pearl with her to the afterlife (111).

The tone of the section where the reader discovers that Hester kills herself shifts from Tituba's matter-of-fact telling to a surreal plea from an unborn baby addressing its mother: "I shall never emerge into the light of day. I shall remain crouched in your waters, deaf, dumb and blind, clinging like kelp to your womb" (111). The speaker implores, "Mother, help me". Neither Tituba nor Hester could answer such a cry, yet the baby's namelessness speaks to the similarities between Tituba and Hester. They are both the child's mother. There is no doubt the two women share a powerful bond at the hands of Salem's patriarchal system of law, and pay a steep price for refusing to "bring children into this dark and gloomy world" (92).

Still, Tituba's agency in her reproductive choice illustrates just one of the ways she has appropriated the allegorical figurations surrounding her body and her creation. In commanding the plants in her garden, and the presences in her womb Tituba reproduces the values centering around fertility that colonialist, Negritude and second wave feminism have assigned to the Black female body; but she reproduces these values, ironically and on her own terms. Michelle Smith rightfully cautions that the novel "does not allegorize the specifics of the (French) West Indian sociohistorical situation (Smith, 606). Smith's implicit rebuke of Jameson speaks to the novel's larger importance; Tituba's control and definition of allegorical figurations of fertility mimetically reproduces Condé's control of the allegorical process and reprocess of creating the Black, Caribbean female body.

*Conclusion*

*An ending of my own choosing – Maryse Condé*

I have examined the employment of allegory in two historical moments in the Caribbean when narratives surrounding race, gender and the politics of language were being challenged and rewritten. In the late 1960s – a timeframe we might label the pre-postcolonial – Césaire treads on the already allegorical figurations of Prospero and Caliban to contemplate Europe’s inescapability from the occurring and impending political shifts in the Caribbean. As he reworks African, American, European, Social Realist and Romantic, Césaire illustrates the ineluctability of diversity in both Caribbean literary and political spaces. Less than twenty years later, Condé deploys allegory to privilege the story and history of a Black woman whose voice had been excluded and whose meaning had been sexually reified in the intervening years both by first world feminism and by Negritude. Both Césaire and Condé invoke the allegorical stereotypes that have defined Caliban and Tituba and even the lives of these authors themselves; but by exerting agency over their allegorical figurations, and by amalgamating races, genders and genres, the two offer a vision of the past that rewrites the future.

There exists a powerful sense of catharsis in A Tempest and I, Tituba. Césaire’s Caliban has completed Hegel’s dialectic and has assumed control of the Island. Condé’s Tituba, too, although not evading her corporeal demise, has assumed control of Barbados in her own way. Caliban sings at the top of his voice and Tituba appears in “the sound of the wind” (66; 179). This is not to say that either the play or the novel presents a happy

ending, or even an ending at all. Rather, they represent allegories and allegorical processes of reading that redefine the gendered and racial relationships in Caribbean texts.

The shift from “The” to “A” in Césaire’s reworking of The Tempest decentralizes the play. The relationship between Caliban and Prospero is one of many, his change implies, and colonialism is an unceasing series of storms blowing toward the Caribbean. In contrast, I, Tituba does not primarily revise a single text. Rather, the bidirectionality of Condé’s response to social and cultural movements, as well as her response to the colonial rhetoric surrounding the site of the black female body, finds the novel more concerned with establishing the agency of its protagonist – *I, Tituba*.

Ironically, we might turn to VS Naipaul for a more optimistic sense of closure. Writing in A House for Mr. Biswas, Naipaul remembers, “the disappointment, his surliness, all the unpleasantness was ignored, and the circumstances improved to allegory” (Naipaul, 56). By the end of both texts, Césaire and Condé have ‘improved’ the narrative that surrounds their subjects – their life, their history, and most importantly, our memory.

I have attempted to chart the improvement of allegory in this thesis, and how that allegory asserts itself as a cultural and social force. From Caliban and Tituba to Césaire and Condé to Caliban and Tituba back again, the process of creating allegory in the Caribbean has existed for several centuries and will continue. “The violence of allegorical making cannot be entirely absorbed”, Teskey asserts and, as its violence and energy lives on, so too will allegory.

Indeed whether through historical research or fiction, poetry or prose, we might heed the advice of Angela Davis in these matters. “The doors to our suppressed cultural histories are still ajar”, she says, “if we are courageous enough to peer through the narrow openings, we will discover our fears, our rage, our hopes, and our roots. And sometimes there is magic behind those doors, sparkling clues about the possibilities ahead”.

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