



## I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (CARAF Books: Caribbean and African Literature translated from the French)

*By Maryse Condé*

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**I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (CARAF Books: Caribbean and African Literature translated from the French)** By Maryse Condé

This wild and entertaining novel expands on the true story of the West Indian slave Tituba, who was accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts, arrested in 1692, and forgotten in jail until the general amnesty for witches two years later. Maryse Condé brings Tituba out of historical silence and creates for her a fictional childhood, adolescence, and old age. She turns her into what she calls "a sort of female hero, an epic heroine, like the legendary 'Nanny of the maroons,'" who, schooled in the sorcery and magical ritual of obeah, is arrested for healing members of the family that owns her.

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This book has been supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency.

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**I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (CARAF Books: Caribbean and African Literature translated from the French) By Maryse Condé Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

The author of the highly recommended intergenerational saga *Tree of Life* (Fiction Forecasts, June 29) moves from her native Guadeloupe to colonial New England in this potent novel. Revising the legend of a slave woman accused of practicing witchcraft and imprisoned in Salem, Mass., in 1692, Conde freely imagines Tituba's childhood and old age, endows her with what Davis calls a contemporary social consciousness, and allows her to narrate the tale. Her pointedly political story indicts the Puritans' racism and hypocrisy and their contemporary manifestations. Conceived when an English sailor rapes an Ashanti captive on the slave ship *Christ the King*, Tituba grows up in Barbados but follows her beloved, John Indian, into servitude in America when he is sold to minister Samuel Parris. Charged with witchcraft when she heals Parris's wife and daughters, she shares a jail cell with Hester Prynne, who helps her plan her testimony before the Salem judges. Eventually reprieved, Tituba is bought by a Jew, himself persecuted, who frees her and gives her passage to Barbados. At once playful and searing, Conde's work critiques ostensibly white, male versions of history and literature by appropriating them.

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From Library Journal

In 1692, a Barbadian slave named Tituba was arrested for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts. From this historical fact, Conde, an acclaimed writer from Guadeloupe, invents Tituba's life story from childhood to old age. As a child, Tituba sees her mother executed. She is then raised by an old woman who teaches her the African art of healing and communicating with spirits. As a young woman, she is sold to a Puritan minister who leaves Barbados for America. Tituba uses her powers for good purposes, including the healing of her master's family. But her powers are misunderstood by the narrow-minded Puritans, who can only associate witchcraft and the blackness of her skin with evil. Far more than an historical novel, Conde's book makes a powerful social statement about hypocrisy, racial injustice, and feminism through the use of postmodern irony. With a foreword by Angela Davis. Highly recommended.

- Joanne Snapp, *Virginia Commonwealth Univ., Richmond*

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From Kirkus Reviews

Caribbean-born Cond, (Segu, 1987; *The Children of Segu*, 1989; and see below) gives questionable life to Tituba, one of the accused and subsequently released witches of Salem, in a novel of some conflicting purpose. In a lengthy afterword that includes an interview with the author, Cond, claims to be expressing her opinion about present-day America, where "little has changed since the days of the Puritans"; to be writing a postmodern mock epic in which she parodies the heroic epic--and contemporary feminism; and to be giving Tituba "a reality that was denied to her because of her color and her gender." But these authorial claims and results seem frequently at odds in this story of Tituba, born on the island of Barbados to a slave raped by a British seaman. When her mother is hung for striking a white man, the child is raised by a local soothsayer who teaches her to summon the dead and heal with herbs. She marries handsome but weak John Indian; and when the couple is sold to the Reverend Samuel Parris, they accompany the Parris family to Salem. There, Tituba practices her healing, tries to help young Betsy Parris, but instead, caught up in the witch-hunt, is accused of trying to harm her. In prison, she meets Hester Prynne, and to defray the cost of her keep is sold to a Jewish widower, a victim of local prejudice, who, grateful for her bringing back his beloved dead, arranges for Tituba to return to Barbados. Back in her old cabin, she is killed when her lover, trying to organize a slave revolt, is betrayed. But Tituba goes on: "Now that I've gone over to the invisible world I

continue to heal and cure. But primarily I have dedicated myself to hardening men's hearts to fight." The confusion of ends doesn't help a book that has too obviously sacrificed a moving and dramatic story to agenda and fashion. Tituba deserves better. -- *Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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