I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem Study Guide

I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem by Maryse Condé

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

"I, Tituba ..." is a fictionalization of the real-life experiences of a black woman tried as a witch in 1600s America. The stern, rigid, Puritanical Christianity of the time is a vivid contrast, and powerfully defining context for the journey of personal transformation undertaken by the title character as she struggles to sustain her spiritual, racial, and gender identity. While its primary thematic concern is with discrimination and its manifestations, the narrative also explores themes relating to the corrupting power of revenge and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

The narrative is introduced by a Forward written by noted American activist Angela Davis, who portrays the book as giving voice to persecuted minorities (blacks, women, non-Christian) who have, as the result of the dominant influence of white, male, Christian power structures, been oppressed for centuries.

The story proper, told in first person past tense narration, begins with Tituba's description of her conception (the result of her mother, a black woman from Africa, being raped on a slave ship by an English sailor). After narrating the circumstances of her child, Tituba describes Abena's death by hanging for resisting the sexual advances of her white owner. The incident, Tituba comments in narration, haunted her for the rest of her life. She then then describes her adoption by Mama Yaya, an elderly wise woman who used herbal medicine and spiritual techniques to heal the sick and communicate with the dead, and who taught Tituba everything she knows. After Yaya dies, Tituba moves onto an isolated farm where she practices her healing techniques. She falls in love with the handsome, sexy, charismatic John Indian, and against her better judgment (and the advice of the ghostly Abena and Yaya) moves into his home on the estate of white slave owner Susanna Endicott.

Tituba soon realizes that she has compromised herself and her identity by allowing herself to be put into a position of submission to Susanna, but her desire to be with John Indian is too strong for her to leave. Her efforts to take revenge on the autocratic, patronizing Susanna (by using herbs and magic to make her ill) end up backfiring, and she (Tituba) is sent with John Indian to America as the property of ultra-religious pastor Samuel Parris. The ultra-Christian community to which Parris and his household are eventually posted (Salem, Massachusetts) treat Tituba with mistrust, as she has gained the reputation and status of a witch. Eventually, as the apparent result of what Tituba firmly believes are the manipulations of Parris' niece Abigail, Tituba is tried for witchcraft and imprisoned.

Tituba is rescued from prison by Benjamin Cohen, a Jewish merchant who, as Tituba suggests in narration, has been subject to as much persecution as she has. She and Cohen begin an intense, often sexual relationship, which is eventually ended by anti-Semitic attacks that destroy both Cohen's family and his business. He sends Tituba back to Barbados, where she is at first welcomed as a kind of heroine by the Maroons, a group of ex-slave rebels. Their tendency towards violence, however, drives Tituba to

return to her farm, which she discovers is still essentially intact after her absence of several years.

As she re-settles herself into what was once her life, Tituba finds herself drawn into an anti-white rebellion led, in part, by the youthful and impulsive Iphigene, whom Tituba takes into her home. As the plans of Iphigene and his fellow rebels near fruition, Tituba experiences heightened foreboding and omens of doom. The rebellion is thwarted, and both Iphigene and Tituba are executed for their role in it. A brief epilogue, still written in Tituba's first person narration, describes her fulfilling existence as a spirit, and expresses optimism for the future of black people.

A lengthy Afterword contains an interview with the author in which she discusses the circumstances and intent with which "I, Tituba ..." came into being.

Forward

Forward Summary

"I, Tituba ..." is a fictionalization of the life of a black woman tried as a witch in 1600s America. The stern, rigid, Puritanical Christianity of the time is a vivid contrast and powerfully defining context for the journey of personal transformation undertaken by the title character as she struggles to sustain her spiritual, racial, and gender identity. While its primary thematic concern is with discrimination and its manifestations, the narrative also explores themes relating to the corrupting power of revenge and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

In this brief introduction, African-American activist Angela Davis suggests that the book is an example of how "contemporary women of African descent - both scholars and artists" are using their talents and skills to define a "lost history". She describes the novel as Tituba's revenge on being forgotten over the centuries since her life, as a complex blend of research and "Tituba's voice", and as "the voice of a suppressed black feminist tradition". She concludes the forward with the suggestion that Tituba's story has the potential to remind "us all" of the possibility of understanding unique cultural histories, if one only has the courage to look further.

Forward Analysis

There are two points of interest here. The first is the identity of the forward's author, Angela Davis who, in the 1960s and 70s, was a leader in the American Communist, feminist and civil rights movements. In other words, and as she herself suggests, she sees Tituba's story from the entwined perspectives of three minority groups that have been (politically, socially, economically, morally) discriminated against for centuries, the laboring poor, women and blacks. The second point to note is the quality of spirituality, almost mysticism, that she attributes to the writing of the book. Here there are echoes of the author's own comments (see "Afterword") in which she also refers to being in perhaps communication or communion with Tituba herself. It may be that this is in fact what happened - writers have frequently, over the years, commented on how their works have been in many ways transcriptions of what a character has "told" them. It may also be possible, as farfetched as it may seem, that there was indeed some kind of connection between the author and the "spirit" of the long dead Tituba. On a less mystical level, however, it's possible to see these comments in more metaphorical terms - as the "voice" of Tituba being an imagined voice not only of the real-life Tituba but also of the hundreds or perhaps thousands of black women over the centuries whose voices were never heard.

Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2

Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Chapter 1 - Writing in first person, Tituba describes the circumstances of her birth and early life. She writes of how her mother Abena was raped on the slave ship carrying her from Africa to Barbados, how Abena's owner found out she was pregnant and gave her to a fellow slave (Yao) who treated her lovingly, and how Abena was distant towards her as she was growing because of how she had been conceived. She describes how Abena and Yao came to love each other, how that love made Abena beautiful, how that beauty moved Abena's owner to attempt to rape her, and how Abena defended herself with a cutlass. This, Tituba writes, led to Abena's execution (slaves did not strike their masters), to Yao's suicide (as he was being transferred to another plantation) and to Tituba's being cast out of the plantation but eventually being taken in by Mama Yaya. Yaya, Tituba writes, knew the language and powers of herbs and nature, and could communicate with the dead, all skills she passed on to Tituba, who writes that she is able to communicate with both her parents and, after Yaya's death, Yaya herself. After Yaya dies, Tituba sets herself up with a small farm by a small lake and describes this time of her life as the happiest. But then she encounters a group of maltreated slaves who react to her with fear, and she realizes she doesn't want to be looked at that way. She wants to be loved, to be regarded as a source of compassion and healing. She longs for powers with which she can take revenge on the white slave owners, but realizes she only knows how "to offer consolation."

Chapter 2 - In this chapter, Tituba describes the beginnings of her relationship with the charming, laughing John Indian. The spirits of both Abena and Mama Yaya warn her against being involved not just with him in particular but with any man, but Tituba finds herself in the grip of uncontrollable desire that is at least partly sexual. When he asks her to live with him on the plantation where he is a slave, she asks for a week to think about it and then asks Mama Yaya to make him want to move to her home. Yaya gently tells her that there are rules to how the world works that she can't break. Tituba, in spite of having a powerful awareness of the inequity of white people's power and knowing that John practices a faith (Christianity) that sounds strange to her (see "Quotes", p. 19), leaves her home and moves to the Endicott plantation on Carlyle Bay.

Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

There are several points to note about this first section. First is the introduction of several narratively important elements of Tituba's life and character. These include the circumstances of her birth (which haunt her life, and the narrative about that life), her accumulation of knowledge of herbs and how to speak with the dead (both of which define most of her later relationships), and the realization that she desires to be looked at as a source of healing and compassion. There is also her relationship with John Indian, portrayed here as a source of several forms of joy but which, later in the

narrative, becomes defined mostly, and almost exclusively by their sexuality, which eventually becomes Tituba's sole source of comfort in their relationship.

Another key point is that Tituba's relationship with John Indian is the first of several in the book that defines one of its key secondary themes - the ambivalence of love. In almost all of Tituba's relationships, love is a double edged sword, providing both comfort and happiness but then eventually souring, as those who initially profess to love her find themselves too weak to continue acting upon that love and sustain the relationships built upon it.

Finally, there are several important foreshadowings in this section. The story of Abena's hanging foreshadows Tituba's own death at the book's conclusion, while the beginning of her relationship with John Indian foreshadows the beginnings of other love-based relationships that, like her relationship with John, end with betrayal. Her longing for powers to destroy rather than heal recurs throughout the narrative, as does her unease with Christianity and with the power of white people. These, in turn, are both key components of the narrative's central thematic examination of the experiences and repercussions of oppression.

Part 1, Chapters 3, 4 and 5

Part 1, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 Summary

Chapter 3 - When Tituba meets John Indian's owner, Susanna Endicott, she is struck by how cold and domineering the woman is, and how ridiculous John makes himself before her. In their little home at the back of the Endicott plantation, John tells her that the slave's first duty is to survive, a comment he repeats to her whenever she seems to be getting angry and resentful of the life she has led herself into. That night, their first together, they make love, and Tituba discovers how much she enjoys sex. As the days pass, and as Tituba begins to learn both the routine of keeping Susanna's house clean and keeping the Christian faith Susanna demands she profess, she also learns of how she and other slaves are viewed by whites as being subhuman (see "Quotes", p. 24). Eventually, Susanna reveals that she knows Tituba's history - how her mother was executed, how her father killed himself, and how she (Tituba) has gained a reputation for being a witch. When Tituba tells John this, he warns her of the trial and probable execution she faces if Susanna ever brings charges. When she realizes that Susanna is clearly plotting against her, Tituba realizes it's time to take action. "There was not room enough in this world," she says, "for Susanna Endicott and me. One of us had to go and it wasn't going to be me."

Chapter 4 - Conversation with Mama Yaya and her mother (in which they both hint at Tituba's troubled future) convinces Tituba to make Susanna inconveniently and unpleasantly ill rather than kill her (see "Quotes", p. 30). This she does, but at a cost - Susanna makes it clear to both Tituba and John that she (Susanna) knows it was Tituba who made her ill, and adds there will be consequences. As Susanna becomes more and more sick, John and his friends and fellow slaves take advantage of her relative lack of control over their lives and party hard with rum, music, and women. A short time later, a tall, thin, sharp looking man visits Susanna, and Tituba imagines that he looks like the Satan she's heard so much about. Later, Susanna tells her and John that at her death, which she believes to be imminent, they are to be sold to an American minister named Samuel Parris. As John pleads for her to change her mind, Tituba realizes that Susanna is punishing her, sending her away from the land she loves. In narration, Tituba describes her awareness that she could very well refuse to go, since Susanna has no legal power over her, but she also realizes that to refuse would be to separate herself from John, something she cannot accept. After leaving Susanna's room and going downstairs, Tituba meets Parris, and is shocked to realize he is the Satanic-looking man she encountered earlier. Parris orders her and John to their knees, and tells them they will be sailing for America the following day.

Chapter 5 - On the ship en route for America, Parris performs a marriage ceremony on John and Tituba. As John says "Amen", Tituba comments in narration that she was unable to speak, "so great was the horror [Parris] instilled in [her]".

Part 1, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 Analysis

Here the narrative continues its contemplation of the ambivalent nature of love, with its juxtaposition of Tituba's joy at being with John Indian and the suffering that following that love brings into her life. It could be argued, at this point, that Tituba's love for John is defined more by sexuality than by anything else, and that as a result, the narrative's comment on love's ambivalence is more specifically a comment on the dangers of becoming absorbed in sexual love. This argument is further strengthened by the narrative fact that Tituba finds herself and her identity repeatedly compromised by the humiliations she endures as the result of her desire to stay with John. In other words, there is the sense here that she and her individual identity are both subjugated to her sexual desires as much as by the white people around her. This sense is balanced to some degree by Tituba's efforts at establishing and/or claiming her power over Susanna by making her ill, but when Susanna banishes her and John, the narrative suggestion is that any attempt Tituba makes to establish and/or define herself on her own terms is doomed to failure. This, in turn, can be seen as a manifestation of the narrative's thematic (and intense) determination to portray white male Christian oppression in uncompromisingly, unrelentingly stark, dark terms.

A key component of that portrayal (Samuel Parris) makes his first appearance in this section, with the juxtaposition between Tituba's perception of him as Satanic and the intensity purity of his faith making the narrative's perspective on Christianity (that it is corrupt and destructive) unavoidably apparent. Here again, Tituba's physical subjugation defines her spiritual and emotional subjugation, embodying the narrative's apparent thematic contention, hinted at in both Foreword and Afterword, that Tituba's story is intended to be perceived as archetypal, that the story of her oppression is in fact the story of the centuries of oppression faced by all women and all blacks.

Part 1, Chapters 6, 7 and 8

Part 1, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Summary

Chapter 6 - Tituba describes how, as the journey to America continued, she developed a friendship with Parris' trusting and vulnerable wife Elizabeth (who, in spite of their closeness, finds Tituba's rejoicing in sex and the body distasteful) and their equally vulnerable daughter Betsey. She gets along less well with Parris' niece Abigail, who constantly demands information and details about Tituba's stories of the invisible world and who Tituba comes to believe is a cunning liar. In narration, Tituba also comments on how foolish John Indian's behavior seems to her, but adds that his playfulness is probably a good balance for her moodiness. When the voyage finally ends in Boston, Parris leads his family and slaves to their temporary home, a cold, dark, musty house the atmosphere of which makes Elizabeth so ill she comes close to death. Tituba realizes she can't tolerate this new life without her and resolves to heal her, substituting local plants and herbs for those back home she would normally use. Elizabeth recovers, and in a quiet moment acknowledges Tituba's role in saving her life.

Chapter 7 - Tituba writes that the Parrises and their slaves lived a year in Boston, during which time Samuel's attempts to find work repeatedly met with rejection, a situation Tituba attributes (in narration) to the intensity and darkness of his faith. In the meantime, she says, the only income was the money made by John Indian stoking fires in inns and wayhouses, money which barely kept the household alive.

Tituba also describes how, when Samuel was out looking for work, she would take Betsey and Abigail out for walks and exercise. On one such walk, she and the girls witness a hanging, which sends Tituba blindly into memories of her mother's execution. Abigail, self-important with gossip, tells her that the woman executed was a witch.

As time passes and spring arrives, Tituba discovers she is pregnant and immediately makes the decision to not have the child (see "Quotes", p. 50). She comments (in narration) that in Barbados she would have easily known what herbs would have enabled her to deliberately miscarry, but doesn't know what in America would perform the same function. One day she manages to slip out of the house and into the woods, where she encounters Judah White, an old woman who says she is acquainted with Mama Yaya and who gives Tituba knowledge about local herbs and remedies. Applying one of them, Tituba miscarries her child and weeps, the efforts at comfort offered by John Indian proving fruitless. As summer arrives, Parris reveals he finally has a parish - Salem, several miles outside of Boston. Gossip passed on by John Indian reveals that the town has a reputation for treating their ministers badly. As the household is preparing to move, Tituba receives some final insights from Judah White, which she says (in narration) seem childish. "In the West Indies," she comments, "our science is nobler and relies more on unseen forces ... but as Mama Yaya used to say: 'when you get to the blind man's country, close both eyes.'"

Chapter 8 - This brief chapter consists mainly of a poem, "Lament for my Lost Child". In narration, Tituba describes teaching it to Betsey, and then one day hearing Abigail hum it. This, she adds, made her want to tell Betsey to keep Tituba's stories and sayings and ways to herself, but then reveals she talked herself out of it (see "Quotes", p. 55).

Part 1, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

Here again, the narrative explores the ambivalent nature of love, this time through Tituba's relationships with Elizabeth and Betsey. Other important points to note include the atmospheric description of the Parris' Boston home (which, in its dank darkness, is a vivid contrast to the bright airiness of Tituba's home in Barbados) and the encounter with the hanging. This, as the narrative itself indicates, powerfully reminds Tituba of her mother's fate, and at the same time foreshadows Tituba's own death at the end of the narrative. Then there is Mama Yaya's comment about living in the country of the blind which, in its general meaning, can be seen as a variation on the old saying "When in Rome, do what the Romans do". In other words, in order to survive, adapt yourself to the ways of the world in which you live.

The most important element of this section, however, is the conception and abortion of Tituba's child. There are several key points to consider here. First is the debatable question of whether Tituba is morally right to do what she does. The second key point is that this relates to several other situations in which children play important, defining roles in Tituba's life and experience. These include her experiences with Betsey and Abigail on the boat, her relationships with them and with the other girls in Salem, and her relationships with Cohen's children in Part 2 (chapters seven through nine), with Iphigene (Part 2, chapter fourteen) and with Samantha (Epilogue). All of these can be seen as surrogates for her own longed-for mother-child relationship. The third, and more generally, noteworthy point here is how the narrative explores so many variations on the mother/daughter relationship. A point clearly related to the question of mother/child relationships can be found in chapter eight. While the narrative never explicitly makes the point, the structural placement of the poem (next to Tituba's narrative of her self-abortion) makes it quite clear that Tituba's attachment to the "Lament" is deeply connected to her own lost child.

Another point to consider about chapter eight is that the description of Abigail's singing the song and of Tituba's reaction foreshadows circumstances later in the novel when Tituba's stories, teachings and actions pass out of the minds and experiences of those with whom they are initially shared into the hands of those who would, and do, use them against her.

Part 1, Chapters 9 and 10

Part 1, Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Chapter 9 - Tituba narrates the Parrish household's arrival in Salem, in particular the inhospitable house (in which, she learns, two members of the previous families who lived there had died) and Parris's confrontations with the members of the community sent to welcome him. She also describes how, as the household settled in, Betsey and Abigail quickly made friends with a circle of girls their age, all of whom became fascinated with Tituba's stories of ritual, nature, and people who dealt with the devil. Eventually, when their questions about the devil (and about whether Tituba is a witch) become too uncomfortable, Tituba forbids all the girls from visiting. At the same time, her loneliness for Barbados becomes so intense that she uses a bowl of water on her windowsill as a focus for her imaginings of home (see "Quotes", p. 62). As the seasons change from fall to winter, and as Tituba becomes more and more mistrustful of Abigail, she also becomes increasingly concerned about Betsey, whose mind, body and spirit all seem to be ill. Tituba eventually resorts to what she calls a "magic bath", substituting local herbs and tonics for what she would use at home and submerging Betsey in scalding hot water in which the remedies had been heated. As a result, Tituba writes, Betsey sleeps better and more soundly than she has in ages.

Chapter 10 - Tituba describes the intensity of Salem's desperate struggle to maintain spiritual/religious purity and the hypocrisy that desperation encouraged, commenting on how she and the few other black servants in the town were often secretly asked to take revenge on those who had hurt its citizens. She describes her descent into slovenliness and indifference, her dreams of returning to Barbados either alive or dead, and of her continued struggle to do as Mama Yaya instructed her - "Don't become like them, knowing only how to do evil." One night, Betsey becomes strangely ill at the supper table, and when Tituba rushes to help, Elizabeth prevents her from doing so. After rationalizing to herself that the once loving Elizabeth had been poisoned by Salem's hypocrisy, Tituba goes to bed. The next morning, when Tituba is called in to the breakfast table by Samuel, Betsy sees her and falls to the floor, writhing and screaming in a voice that Tituba describes as similar to that of a pig being slaughtered. She then describes how Abigail, after deliberately looking at both Samuel and Tituba, falls to the floor in a similar fit. Samuel takes the girls upstairs, Elizabeth explains to the nosy neighbors that the girls are being beaten for their own good, and Tituba realizes that somehow both Elizabeth and Betsey have been turned against her. Abigail, she believes, "was but an accomplice". Tituba realizes she has to try and re-establish her connection with Betsey and that she has to protect herself, to fight "blow by blow" the evil she is encountering. In narration, however, she comments that she underestimated the forces she was facing (see "Quotes", p. 73)

Part 1, Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The most important point to note about this section, aside from its elements of plot (Tituba's actions in helping Betsey, Betsey's and Abigail's fits, the growing accusations of witchcraft) is how the narrative deepens its portrayal of Christianity as both corrupt and corruptive. There are two points to consider here. First is how Parris and other members of the community are rendered, particularly in chapter ten, as being (for the most part) more interested in appearing holy and righteous than in actually living in such a way. This depiction continues in the following chapters.

The second point about the portrayals of Christianity in this section is that the warnings made by Yaya to Tituba clearly suggest that the desire for revenge (essentially a manifestation of both power and status) is, in fact, an unavoidable component of that corrupt Christianity. Her warning Tituba not give in to her desire for revenge (a repetition of a warning first passed on back in chapter three in relation to Susanna Endicott) seems to suggest not only that Tituba avoid becoming like the whites, but that she also avoid becoming like the Christians. There is considerable irony here, specifically in Yaya's suggestion that Tituba not give in to evil in the way the white Christians (supposedly devoted to bringing God's spiritual word to earthly life) have.

At this point, it's important to mention that several aspects of "I, Tituba ..." are also incorporated into a well-known work by American playwright Arthur Miller. The plot and circumstances of "The Crucible" are, in fact, the same as those of this section of the book and the chapters that follow. While they are explored from a different point of view (that is, "The Crucible" focuses on the white citizens of Salem), but it could nevertheless be argued that both it and "I. Tituba ..." emerged from similar authorial perspectives on injustice and oppression.

Part 1, Chapters 11 and 12

Part 1, Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Chapter 11 - After a sleepless night in which John Indian harshly reminds her that she, and all black people, were hated and feared by all whites, Tituba watches as Abigail and Betsey again go into their screaming, writhing performance at breakfast. This time they are brought out of it by John throwing a pail of cold water on them. At church, in front of the whole community, Abigail throws another fit, but Betsey doesn't. Back at the house, Tituba finds an opportunity to be alone with Betsey and asks what she's doing, but Betsey tells her to leave her alone, and that she and all "Negresses" are pure evil. Going back downstairs, Tituba and her disappointment take refuge in the kitchen, where she is visited by one of the town matrons who urges her to magically rid herself of the danger and persecution she's facing by baking a cake with her urine in it and feeding it to the town. Tituba angrily tells her to leave, comments in narration on how suddenly beautiful and excited Abigail and her young friends are, and describes her dreams that night of Susanna Endicott, Samuel Parris, and her longed for home in Barbados.

Chapter 12 - A visit by Salem's doctor, whom Tituba describes as having once had respect for her ways of healing, reinforces Samuel's belief that Betsey and Abigail, who display no physical signs of ailment, have been victimized by Satan. The doctor also, however, urges Samuel to consult with greater authorities than him, a suggestion that (as Tituba describes it) suddenly shocks the two girls into silence, aware of the magnitude of what they're doing. After the doctor goes, Samuel pushes Tituba against a wall and vows to see her hang. Tituba runs out to visit Anne Putnam who, according to her daughter, has wanted for some time to talk to Tituba about her "visions". Before she can speak to Anne, however, Tituba is drawn into confrontation with the women of the town, but rejects the support of one of them, Elizabeth Proctor. In narration, Tituba comments on her need to speak with the apparently present but unavailable Mama Yaya and Abena. The following morning at sunrise, she steals a sheep, sacrifices it with a prayer for forgiveness, and opens her heart and mind (see "Quotes", p. 85). When she finally appears, Mama Yaya says that Tituba and all "niggers" face misfortune, but they are all tough, and out of the current misfortune, she adds, Tituba will be the only one to survive. Abena, for her part, only sighs, and then both spirits disappear. On her way home, Tituba confronts the woman from whom she stole the sheep, who hints heavily that she (Tituba) is soon to be executed. In narration, Tituba describes her subsequent fear (see "Quotes", p. 86), but manages to take some comfort in Yaya's assurances that she will survive.

Part 1, Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Key points to note about this section include the narrative reiteration of Christian hypocrisy (the "Christian" town matron urging Tituba to resort to witchcraft and revenge), a narrative point that creates a key contrast with one of the narrative's few

portrayals of genuine "Christian" compassion and forbearance (Elizabeth Proctor). This last is particularly noteworthy, in that Elizabeth is one of the central characters in "The Crucible". Another important point is Yaya's comment on how "niggers" (the narrative's word) all face misfortune but are all tough. This, and John Indian's comment at the beginning of chapter ten, can be seen as descriptions of both past and more contemporary circumstances (it must be remembered that the novel was originally written in the aftermath of the American Civil Rights movement, and within the context of ongoing struggles for racial, ethnic and/or gender equality).

There is a further point to note about John Indian's comments at the beginning of chapter eleven. On one level, they can be seen as a reiteration of his frequent comment that the first duty of a slave is to survive, the comment here apparently intended to point out the circumstances under which that survival must take place. On another level, his comments can be seen as a foreshadowing of his eventual participation in the so-called "witch hunt" - specifically, his having a fit in front of the town similar to those of Abigail, Betsey and the other girls. His comments and actions, here and throughout the book, raise an interesting question - how far should a person go in order to ensure their own survival.

Part 2, Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Part 2, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

Chapter 1 - At a meeting of three magistrates gathered by Samuel Parris, Betsey, Abigail and Anne Putnam denounce Tituba and two others as witches. Tituba proclaims her innocence, but later is beaten and sexually assaulted by four black clad men (one of whom she recognizes as Parris) in an attempt to make her confess and at the same time name other women in the village who joined her in practicing witchcraft. As he comforts his wife, John Indian again reminds her that her first duty is to survive, and that she must give her tormentors what they want. Later, as she and the other two accused are transported to jail, Tituba resolves to do as her husband suggests, and denounce the women of the town.

Chapter 2 - While in prison, Tituba shares a cell with a woman named Hester, who tells Tituba that she is pregnant with the child of a man who isn't her husband and who is to be tried for adultery. Her punishment, she says will be to wear an "A" on her clothes for the rest of her life. They discuss their respective situations, with Hester urging Tituba to give her persecutors what they want (i.e., vivid pictures of her relationship with the devil) and to take revenge only on those who persecute her (generalized revenge, Hester says, will make Tituba like those she hates). Hester describes her dreams of living in a society governed by women and, when Tituba comments on how much she loves John, says that Tituba will never be a "feminist". In spite of Hester's assurances and instruction, Tituba's fear becomes more and more intense (see "Quotes", p. 102), tainting her dreams of returning to Barbados with thoughts of violence following her from Salem. At the end of February, Tituba comments in narration, she and her fellow accused were returned to Salem to face trial.

Chapter 3 - Tituba tells her accusers that she is innocent of any evil intent, and that she was only doing the bidding of men and animals who ordered her to serve them, which she did under threat of worse being done to her. A footnote comments that Tituba's deposition (statement of facts) was taken from the original transcripts of her trial, still archived in Massachusetts. At the conclusion of the chapter, Samuel tells her she did well. Tituba comments in narration that she hates herself as much as she hates him.

Part 2, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

There are several important points to note in this section. The first is the narrative of the trial, the circumstances and content of which are not only historically documented (and therefore unarguably true) but are also the source material for "The Crucible". The second is the rape scene described in chapter one, which can be seen as a metaphoric representation of what white male Christianity is doing to black femaleness and/or the natural world (i.e., destruction through demoralization and/or violence). The third key

point is John Indian's reiteration of the necessity to survive, and again, the question is whether there is any cost too great to pay for that survival.

The final, and most important, point, about this section is the character of Hester. As suggested in "Characters" and in the author's "Afterword", Hester is a character in another book ("The Scarlet Letter") about women's life during the Puritan Age in America. Her presence here is noteworthy for several reasons. Like Tituba, Hester is condemned because she is a woman determined to live her life on her own terms - specifically, outside the terms set for her by white, Christian male power structure. Hester is also, at least in part, in her current situation as the result of succumbing to the demands of love and the body (for a man not her husband) in the same way as Tituba. Hester's appearance and story therefore reiterate the earlier narrative suggestion that giving in to the devices and desires of love and the body is, at least in the perhaps authorial perspective of the narrative, life and identity threatening. Ultimately, however, the sense here is that the author intends Hester and Tituba to be kindred spirits, with the outspoken Hester (more outspoken here than in her own book) also apparently intended to serve as inspiration to Tituba (inspiration she, in her desire for revenge, is unable to fully follow).

Another parallel between Tituba and Hester is the latter's pregnancy (which, like Tituba's, will be terminated, only in Hester's case by her execution) and the means of their deaths. Both are executed by hanging, but within that parallel there is a significant difference. Hester remains essentially defiant, taking an active stand against the power structure that condemns her, while Tituba, by contrast, is essentially passive, supporting Iphigene and the other male rebels. There is an interesting point to consider here - specifically, which of these two women, martyred in the name of female independence, identity and pride, is the stronger embodiment of feminist courage?

Part 2, Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7

Part 2, Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 Summary

Chapter 4 - Imprisoned in a barn in Salem, Tituba is visited by the apologetic Elizabeth Parris, who tells her that she now realizes the conspiracy against Tituba and that the conspiracy has spread to affect a large number of innocent women, now being tried as witches on the basis of evidence given by Abigail and the other girls. Elizabeth asks for Tituba's forgiveness for herself and for Betsey who, she adds, has been sent to live with a kinder, more tolerant uncle. Tituba also learns that John Indian has said he too has been possessed, and is upset to discover that he looks more prosperous than ever, adding in narration that after she was transferred to another prison she never saw him again. She narrates her shock and despair at learning that Hester hung herself (see "Quotes", p. 111), and begins to feel a dark temptation to end her own life.

Chapter 5 - In this brief chapter, Tituba writes of her grieving thoughts for both her and Hester's unborn children, repeating the lament first seen in Part 1, chapter eight. She then describes an encounter with the four-year-old daughter of Sarah Good (see Part 2, chapter three), who has also been accused of dealing with the devil and thrown in prison and who asks Tituba if she knows where her mother is. Tituba is unable to help her and sings the lament to her.

Chapter 6 - As the accusations of witchcraft continue to spread throughout the area, Tituba describes watching cartloads of convicted women, most of whom she says are innocent, being transported to their executions. She writes of being visited in spirit by Mama Yaya, who again tells her that she will be the only one to survive the carnage, of hearing rumors of the many accusers dying mysterious deaths, and of the martyrdom of a good man wrongly accused. "This God", she writes, "for whom [the colonists] had left the meadows and woods of England, was turning his back on them." Soon afterward, however, the trials are stopped - the governing authorities, she says, suspect members of the court of colluding with the accusers. This, she adds, had no effect on her. She was "condemned to live!"

Chapter 7 - Tituba describes how she came to work in the prison kitchen preparing passable food from bad supplies, how she got a reputation as a good cook, and how she began to be hired out to cook for parties. She describes the legal tradition of the time in which prisoners were responsible for paying for their own upkeep, and how she was taunted about owing so much money that no-one would ever be able to pay for her freedom. One day, however, when visited by a man contemptuously described by her jailer as a Jew and a merchant, she recognizes him as both a kindred spirit (she senses that "he, too, was from the land of the suffering") and as a source of hope. As a merchant, she comes to believe, he may have dealings with Barbados, and may be able to get her home. After dreams in which she envisions her return home and is visited by Hester (who lies next to her and introduces her to new possibilities for physical and/or sexual comfort), the Jew buys Tituba's freedom. She is released from her chains and

begins the painful, awkward process of relearning how to be a human being (see "Quotes", p. 122). "Few people," she writes, "have the misfortune to be born twice."

Part 2, Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 Analysis

There is the clear sense, at the beginning of this section, that for both Tituba and the reader, Elizabeth Parris' repentance and plea for forgiveness is too little, too late. This sense continues into the narrative of how the trials are stopped - again, it seems to both Tituba and the reader that too much damage has been done to too many innocent lives to be forgiven and/or forgotten. It's interesting to note meanwhile, that the narrative includes no suggestion that Tituba forgave either Elizabeth or Betsey. Is the principle of forgiveness, one wonders, too much of a Christian tradition/principle for Tituba to contemplate?

Meanwhile, chapter four contains yet another reiteration of John Indian's belief in the necessity of survival, albeit one communicated through action (i.e., his "having" a fit) rather than through words. It is perhaps fitting that after this point, he disappears from an active role in the narrative and from Tituba's life - ironically enough, in ensuring that he lives, he has essentially become dead to his wife. At the same time, Hester's death by hanging foreshadows Tituba's own death at the end of the book, while her appearance in Tituba's dreams contains shadowy hints not so much of latent lesbianism (although those hints are certainly there) but of female solidarity. In other words, the visit of Hester's spirit suggests (more, incidentally and perhaps strangely, than those of Abena and Yaya) that on some level the author intends Tituba's story to be perceived as carrying on the spirit of feminism, not named as such but present in the lives of independent idealists like Hester and other unnamed women over the centuries.

Finally, there is a significant irony in the last words of chapter seven (Tituba's reference to "the misfortune [of being] born twice". Christian teaching (of the conservative sort espoused by Parris and the other Christians portrayed throughout the novel as profound hypcrites) traditionally celebrates the prospect, idea and circumstances of being "born again" into the live and being of Christ. It is, for them, a blessing. For Tituba, however, being "born again" is a curse, a source of suffering rather than of joy.

Part 2, Chapters 8, 9 and 10

Part 2, Chapters 8, 9 and 10 Summary

Chapter 8 - Tituba finds herself absorbed into the Jewish household and home of Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo, a recent widower with nine children, none of whom speak English. She observes (and narrates) his obsession with the centuries of ill treatment experienced by Jews the world over, gratefully accepts gifts of his late wife's clothing, and becomes painfully aware of his longing for his wife. She recalls the rituals of bringing the dead to speak with the living and, with the encouragement of the spirit form of Hester, brings Cohen's wife to him and, eventually, to their oldest daughter. She also writes of how their emotional intimacy became sexual intimacy, commenting that she often longed for the sexier, more muscular John Indian, but nevertheless found sexual pleasure with Cohen. She describes his violently negative reaction when she tells him of her desire to return to Barbados (a reaction based on his desire to continue seeing his dead wife), and of her absorption of his Jewish attitudes towards the rest of the world. A conversation with a fellow Negro escapee from Salem reveals that that the witch hunt has been revealed to be the result of family politics (see "Quotes", p. 129), and that John Indian has become the lover of a wealthy white woman. Back in her attic at Cohen's home, Tituba lets pain "flood through [her]" while the family prays downstairs.

Chapter 9 - In this very brief chapter, Tituba describes Cohen's attempts to get her to convert to Judaism, her own awareness that "misfortune never gives up ... it singles out those of a certain sort", and her waiting for misfortune to return to her life.

Chapter 10 - As the result of anti-Semitic attacks on his family (including the burning of his house with all nine children inside) and business (the burning of his two ships), Cohen decides to move to another part of America where, he tells Tituba, Jews are still allowed to live and work freely. He tells her that he believes he is being punished for not giving Tituba her liberty, gives her papers to prove that she is in fact free, and arranges for her to travel back to Barbados. The racist captain of her transport ship, however, is warned that she is one of the witches of Salem, and agrees to transport her only if she helps ensure a safe journey, healing sickness and raising winds. Tituba agrees to do what she can, and on the journey heals many illnesses. She becomes friends with a fellow slave from Barbados, Deodatus, who simultaneously makes her long for home and doubt her purpose in returning. Late in the journey, when the ship is becalmed, the captain orders her to raise a wind, which she manages to do. The wind becomes a storm, and although Tituba realizes the mistakes she made in her ritual, it's too late to do anything about them. Eventually, the ship arrives in Barbados but, Tituba comments in narration, Deodatus has disappeared.

Chapter 11 - In this very brief chapter, Tituba comments in narration on the brief moments of happiness she shared with her "sweet, crooked, misshapen lover", and on how angry the feminist Hester would be with her (see "Quotes", p. 140).

Part 2, Chapters 8, 9 and 10 Analysis

A key component of the narrative's thematic perspective on oppression is introduced in this section with the appearance of Benjamin Cohen. Here the author simultaneously deepens and broadens her considerations of the subject, portraying yet another manifestation of white, male, Christian prejudice in action. At the same time, the narrative also reiterates its thematic contention that love (in this case, Cohen's love for his children and family) and sexual connection (between Cohen and Tituba) is not enough to enable and/or sustain both survival and courage. In other words, compassionate love, love born of connection and honesty and humility, is not enough to withstand prejudice and hatred. Meanwhile, the hypocrisy of that prejudice (specifically, of Christian prejudice) is again exposed through the actions and desires of the ship's captain, who condemns Tituba for what she is believed to be but is prepared to make use of those rumored abilities in order to achieve his own ends.

At this point, it's worth considering the author's comment (incorporated into her Afterword) that the narrative is intended to be mock-heroic, a satire on stories of larger than life characters triumphing over incredible odds, empowered by commitment to a life of personal integrity. There are certainly reasons why using, and at times satirizing, the conventions of such stories is effective in this case. These reasons include drawing the reader into a narrative (i.e., creating a sense of suspense) and define the story as having a sense of universality (i.e., every human being faces struggles to survive both physically and morally). It could be argued that the serious thematic and narrative subject matter explored in "I, Tituba..." is, to some degree, disrespected by the author's stylistic and narrative choices. It could also be argued, however, that such choices do not ultimately negate, or even weaken, the novel's thematic condemnation of racial, gender and spiritual oppression (or, in fact, the serious points of other works in which such techniques are employed). In other words, making an important point in comic form in no way negates or undermines either the point itself or the necessity of making it. Rather, incorporating such a point into a stimulating and engaging narrative perspective (as opposed to something that sounds like a sermon or lecture) goes a long way towards ensuring the reader both hears and appreciates that point.

Part 2, Chapters 12, 13 and 14

Part 2, Chapters 12, 13 and 14 Summary

Chapter 12 - When she arrives in Barbados, Tituba is welcomed first by the spirits of Mama Yaya, Abena and Yao, and then by the living Deodatus and two female companions. They take her to Belleplaine, on the other end of the island, and introduce her to a small band of escapees from the white man's draft, called Maroons. When the Maroons meet her, they ask about her abilities as a witch, and she gives them the answers they seem to want. That night, their leader (Christopher) visits Tituba's tent and asks her to make him invincible and immortal, hinting at sexual favors if she agrees. After he's gone, Tituba consults with her mother (who points out that all Tituba really wants is to have sex with him) and with Mama Yaya (who points out that when it's time for someone to die, nothing anyone can do will stop it happening). Later, Tituba after being visited by the spirits of Hester, Cohen, and his oldest daughter, Tituba falls into a deep sleep, feeling very much at home and as though her past in Boston and Salem is long in the past.

Chapter 13 - Tituba describes her efforts at increasing her powers and deepening her knowledge, efforts which lead her to consult one of the area's "obeah" men (wise men), who taunts her about not having taken greater revenge on the people of Salem (see "Quotes", p. 149). On her way back to the maroon camp, she is warned by some slaves that a few of the plantation owners have heard of her and are plotting against her. This, combined with Christopher's rejection (after a period of sexual relations which triggered longings for John Indian) and the strange half-tolerance, half-hatred of the maroon women, makes Tituba leave the camp and return to her cabin, which she is pleased to discover is still where she left it and still whole. With the help of some local slaves and her three guardian spirits, whom she says never leave her, she establishes a simple, prayerful, natural life, in which she develops her healing powers even more.

Chapter 14 - Tituba discovers that she is pregnant with Christopher's child, becomes convinced that the baby is a girl, and begins a ritualized caring for herself and the child. At the same time, she becomes increasingly desperate to change the world her baby is going to be born into. Meanwhile, she heals the severely beaten Iphigene, the illegitimate, outspoken son of legendary hero Ti-Noel beaten nearly to death by masters who had had enough of his rebelliousness. As he heals, their conversation leads her to confess her desire to drive the whites off the land, a desire which he echoes and which he puts into action, gathering groups of similarly intentioned slaves and urging Tituba to use her influence with Christopher to get him involved as well. As the time of the proposed rebellion draws closer, Tituba consults with her three spirits, who suggest to her not only that the time is not right, but that the suffering of black people will have no end.

Part 2, Chapters 12, 13 and 14 Analysis

As the book approaches its climax, its emotional and narrative momentum begins to build. The energy of desperation for things to change builds both in and around Tituba, through her relationships with her unborn child and with Iphigene, her surrogate child. However, as previously discussed, that desperation is expressed passively - unlike Abena, Hester and Iphigene, all who directly challenge the status quo (as defined by white male power), Tituba reacts passively, allowing events to unfold without her active participation. Here, perhaps, is the ultimate expression of the author's intention to make Tituba and her story mock-heroic (see "Afterword" and "Analysis - chapters nine through eleven) - in in this section, and in the final section that follows, Tituba's actions fall short of what is traditionally held to be heroic.

Also in this section, Tituba's sexuality again gets her into difficulties, this time with Christopher and the rest of the Maroons (and, in the following section, with Iphigene). Again, the question is raised of the author's intent when it comes to a character (Tituba) whose femaleness the narrative celebrates in so many ways but whose sexuality is almost without exception a source of trouble. Finally, there is one other primary difficulty impeding her peaceful life (a life, the narrative seems to suggest, she is both meant, and quite content, to live). This is her lingering, simmering desire for revenge which, as the result of being manipulated by Iphigene, comes to the surface in both this and the following section. It's important to note that although, as mentioned above, Tituba essentially reacts passively, she still participates in the rebellion. In other words, inaction is still a form of action ... just not, again as discussed, of the traditionally heroic sort.

Part 2, Chapter 15, Epilogue

Part 2, Chapter 15, Epilogue Summary

Chapter 15 - In the final days before the attack, Iphigene and the other rebels gather arms and weapons, distributing them among the other slaves. Meanwhile, Tituba's baby moves within her for the first time, and Tituba dreams of meeting her face to face. On the night before the attack, Iphigene brings home a stolen rabbit, and Tituba feels a shudder of foreboding at the thought of consuming an animal who hasn't been asked for forgiveness before being killed. As she's gutting it, two "rotting balls of flesh wrapped in a green membrane" (babies) fall out. This startles her to the point where she drops her knife into her foot, causing a wound that, in spite of her and Iphigene's best efforts, bleeds profusely. That night, Tituba's three companion ghosts visit her and reassure her, but Tituba nevertheless continues to feel nervous. Later, Tituba is surprised when Iphigene initiates sex with her. At first she resists, aware of her unattractiveness and age, but then sexual desire takes over and they have passionate sex. As he falls asleep, Tituba lies awake remembering her past and wondering what's happening to John Indian (see "Quotes", p. 170). Sometime in the night, she and Iphigene are surprised in their beds by the smell of smoke - someone is burning the cabin down. In narration, Tituba describes how the rebellion was thwarted, how Iphigene and the other leaders were executed, and how she too was led to the gallows, partly because of her involvement in the rebellion and partly because the landowners believe she escaped justice in Salem. As she climbs to her death, she sees Mama Yaya, Abena and Yao "waiting to take [her] by the hand."

Epilogue - Tituba describes what she's been doing since her death - listening to the songs being sung about her, continuing to heal and cure, and working with the spirit of Iphigene to inspire revolution and the struggle for freedom. She also describes her relationship with a spirited, intelligent girl named Samantha who, Tituba says, she was allowed by the spirits to "adopt" as her own, since she never gave birth. She also describes how her spirit has become one with the spirit of the island, its ways and roads and lands (see "Quotes", p. 177), reveals her regret at being separated from the spirit of Hester (which cannot cross the sea), her faith that the suffering of all black people will eventually end, and her ways of encouraging despairing slaves. Finally, she writes of briefly returning to the physical world in the form of an animal or another form of nature, and of being known/recognized by Samantha (see "Quotes", p. 179).

Part 2, Chapter 15, Epilogue Analysis

This section contains the narrative's climax, its highest point of emotion and the point at which the plot reaches its highest point of confrontation. In this case, both high points merge in a single incident - Tituba's climbing to the gallows, a recreation of several defining moments in her life and, as the narrative suggests, the climax of her many confrontations with white, male, Christian justice and authority. That said, the moment is

also a metaphoric climax, in that several manifestations of the mother/child motif all intersect here. The relationships between Abena and Tituba, Tituba and Yaya, Tituba and her two unborn children, and even Tituba and Samantha all are defined and/or illuminated by Tituba's encountering and embracing death. It must also be noted that the mother/child motif is also illustrated by Tituba's encounter with the dead rabbit and her two babies. It could be argued that, in the same way as the rabbit and her children were destroyed by a man (Iphigene), Tituba and hers were also, ultimately, destroyed by men. Whether the metaphor was intended by the author isn't explicitly clear, but what is quite plain is that the encounter is a symbolic representation of Tituba herself and the two children who, as the result of her actions, were never allowed to live

Perhaps the most interesting component of this section is the revelation that Tituba has been recounting her story from the grave, that she is speaking to the reader from the world of the dead. On one level, this is not a particularly unique narrative technique. On another level, this circumstance can be seen as a further manifestation of the book's spiritual sensibility which is, in turn (as the author suggests in her Afterword) a manifestation of her intent to tell Tituba's story in "mock-heroic" terms. This, however, raises an interesting question. If the reader is intended to take this particular facet of the narrative as at least a partial joke, how seriously does the author intend the reader to take Tituba's beliefs that black suffering will end? Given that the book was written at a time when the black struggle for equal rights was still ongoing (and, it could be argued, still is), it might not be unreasonable to suggest that the author is proposing the reader not take Tituba's expression of hope too seriously either. In other words, irony seems to be suggesting that peace and freedom and integrity are, for all black people, a long way away.

Historical Note, Glossary, Afterword, Bibliography

Historical Note, Glossary, Afterword, Bibliography Summary

Historical Note - The author makes brief note of the historical nature and/or circumstances of several of the book's characters, commenting on the fact that the historical record makes no explicit note of who purchased Tituba or what happened after she left prison.

Glossary - A list of terms, some of which were invented by the author, that appear throughout the book.

Afterword - The book contains a lengthy afterword prepared by scholar Ann Armstrong Scarboro and including a lengthy interview with the author. In the first part, Scarboro discusses the history of Barbados and other French Caribbean countries and the development of French Caribbean literature, referring to the writing and publishing of "I, Tituba ..." as a defining moment in both areas. She explores the author's personal and literary history, paralleling several of her experiences (including marrying a man her family did not like and returning to the island/culture where she was born) with Tituba's. After commenting on the author's development as a novelist, Scarboro compares the author's work and the work of other French Caribbean writers with the mission of the maroons, rebel slaves fighting against the oppression of the slave owners.

The second part of the Afterword consists of Scarboro's interview with the author, who describes her accidental discovery of the real life Tituba and her story, her sense of determination to give Tituba a voice and ending that she (Tituba) deserves, and the strong sense of connection she (the author) felt with her (Tituba). The author comments that she felt strongly influenced by Tituba's presence, and that she (the author) wasn't all that interested in using anything more than the bare bones of the historical record in her work. She also comments on other works of fiction related to hers - a book about Tituba (which she dismisses as a sentimental story of triumph over adversity) and the play "The Crucible" which she also dismisses, since "a white male writer would not pay attention to a black woman". She also discusses the novel "The Scarlet Letter", in which the character Hester plays the central role, and then comments that writing Tituba was at least in part "an opportunity to express her feelings about present day America", particularly its lingering, Puritan-defined racism. She also comments on her deliberate use of contemporary terms like "feminist" (used principally by Hester) in an attempt to more clearly link past with present. The author then refers to the limits of historical consideration when it comes to race, discusses the book's emphasis on racism and sexism, and in conclusion suggests that it contains a strong element of parody, specifically (and as previously discussed) in the mock-heroic portrayal of the central character and the "overdrawn" presence of the invisible/supernatural.

The third part of the afterword contains Scarboro's detailed analysis of the novel and its central character.

Historical Note, Glossary, Afterword, Bibliography Analysis

One of the more intriguing aspects of the Afterword is its clearly communicated sense that the author is a very outspoken human being, with strong opinions and little (or no) fear of expressing them. It would seem that she is, in many ways, the opposite of Tituba, whose does have strong opinions but who rarely has, is given, or takes, the opportunity to express them. There is the sense, in fact, that the author sees herself as having the kind of voice (as a woman, as black, as a creative spirit) that Tituba never had, and that by creating the book she (the author) is addressing the injustice not only encountered by Tituba but by the countless disadvantaged who came before. There is also the sense, communicated by the comments of the Afterword's editor when she draws a parallel between the author's writing and the rebellious acts of the maroons, that the author is continuing to address that injustice in her own way.

The other more intriguing aspect of the Afterword is the reference to the narrative being a "mock-epic", with the character of Tituba being established as being simultaneously exaggerated (particularly when it comes to her spirituality) and grounded in reality (the circumstances of a life of a slave at that time). The author's own commentary on her book's relationship with history is discussed at the beginning of the Afterword. What's important to note is how these two primary points of reference intersect, the literal with the fantastic. They meet at what might be described as a point of awareness and need - specifically, the point at which Tituba awakens readers to awareness that much of the oppression she encountered still exists and still needs to be challenged, so that the racial freedom and peace dreamed about, and promised to the reader, by Tituba can finally, actually come into being.

Characters

Tituba

Tituba is the book's central character, its protagonist and narrator. Her story is at least partly based on the life of an actual person - a black servant named Tituba appears in transcripts and court records made at the time of the legendary Salem Witch Trials. Another interpretation of the life of this character appears in the well known play "The Crucible". In contrast to both sketchy portrayals, the version of Tituba that appears here is, as suggested in both the Forward (by activist Angela Davis) and the Afterword (by the author herself), an attempt to bring dimension, meaning and value to what has essentially been a legal, historical and/or dramatic footnote.

To be more specific, in both the court records and "The Crucible", Tituba appears/is portrayed as both peripheral and dismissable, unworthy of consideration because as both Forward and Afterword contend, she is black, she is a woman, and she is a non-Christian. "I, Tituba ...", again as both Forward and Afterword maintain, is an attempt to draw attention to what is ultimately an archetypal, universal experience of oppression and devaluing. In other words, Tituba in all her multi-faceted complexity (an exile, a sexual being, a mother, a daughter, a child of rape, a woman, black, and attuned to the power of nature) is both an individual and an archetype. She has her own identity, and is at the same time defined by the characteristics, not to mention the treatment and the fate, of any/everyone who has ever been oppressed by white, male, Christian power.

Abena and Yao

These characters are Tituba's parents, Abena her biological mother (who conceived her after being raped by a sailor on a slave ship) and Yao her adoptive father (who gave her her name and taught Abena to love her previously resented daughter). Abena is portrayed as strong willed, outspoken and individualistic, while Yao is portrayed as quieter, gentler, and more emotionally flexible. Both characters die early in Tituba's life, Abena as the result of an act of willful resistance to white male power (in other words, she is portrayed as both a martyr and an inspiration). Her execution by hanging simultaneously traumatizes Tituba and foreshadows her own eventual death. Both Abena and Yao continue to be a spiritual presence in Tituba's life after their death, frequently manifesting (Abena more so) when Tituba seeks comfort and/or advice.

Mama Yaya

The elderly, eccentric Mama Yaya adopts Tituba after the deaths of her parents and teaches her the ways of nature, most importantly ways of healing and how to communicate with the dead. In many ways, she mentors Tituba, both as a living being and as a spirit - she, like Abena and Yao, manifests to Tituba in times of need and/or stress. Yaya's presence is sometimes irritating to Tituba, in that she (Yaya) doesn't

always give the answers and/or guidance Tituba thinks she wants. Nevertheless, her presence and support is an invaluable refuge to Tituba in times of trial, and even at the moment of her (Tituba's) death.

John Indian

John is Tituba's husband and lover, and like Tituba, is based on brief references in court documents and other historical records. His essentially happy nature is, in the early years of their relationship (as Tituba herself comments) a good balance for her essential gloominess and reserve. Later, however, he proves to be fickle and unreliable, more self-interested than selfless. His motto, repeated to Tituba throughout their life together and even in her memories after they separate, is that the first duty of a slave is to survive, a motto by which he lives to the point of compromising both his identity and integrity, a compromise Tituba is reluctant to make for herself.

Susanna Endicott

Susanna Endicott is the elderly white woman for whom John Indian works as a slave in everything but official name. He believes that she sees him as much as a companion as a servant, but her treatment of Tituba and eventual treatment of John clearly suggests otherwise. Susanna is rigid, judgmental, and vindictive, characteristics that trigger Tituba's first efforts at using her "powers" for revenge". She (Susanna) can be seen as the first of several portrayals of white Christian narrowness and authority throughout the narrative.

Samuel Parris

Parris is the white male Christian pastor to whom Tituba and John Indian are sold by Susanna Endicott (once she realizes that her illness is the result of Tituba's "witchcraft"). Rigid, puritanical, judgmental and obsessive, he is the exact opposite in every way of Tituba and the life she strives to live, acting both from a place of judgment and a desire to at least dominate, if not destroy, that which his faith tells him is evil. In his close mindedness, lack of compassion, and lust for power, he comes across as an embodiment of what the narrative suggests is the essential hypocrisy of the Christian faith and those who practice it. He, the members of his family referred to below, and several other citizens of the Salem community are, like Tituba and John Indian, based upon historically real people. Parris, along with Betsey and Abigail also appear in "The Crucible".

Elizabeth and Betsey Parris

Elizabeth is Samuel's vulnerable wife, Betsey his sickly troubled daughter. Both become friendly with Tituba on the voyage from Barbados to America, both benefit from her healing abilities and her capacity for compassion, both turn on her when faced with

Samuel's power and Abigail's lies, and both (according to Elizabeth) eventually repent. They can be seen as metaphorically embodying what the narrative suggests is the essential corruptibility of the Christian faith and those who practice it.

Abigail Williams

Abigail is Parris' orphaned niece who makes her home with him and his family. She is portrayed throughout the narrative as being a liar and a manipulator, always looking for ways to take advantage of others and gain power for herself. Her actions and determination to destroy, apparently for its own sake, lead her to manipulate Betsey and other young women of Salem into actions that eventually destroy the lives of Tituba and other women of the town.

Hester (Prynne)

Hester is a woman encountered by Tituba during her time in prison, having been found guilty of adultery and discovered to be pregnant with the child of a man not her husband. Defiant and determined, she urges Tituba to take revenge only on those who have directly and deliberately harmed her, as opposed to on the entire Salem community (as John Indian urged her to do). That, Hester says, would make Tituba as harsh and judgmental as those who persecute her. In that, her words and opinions echo those of Mama Yaya, who tells Tituba several times that giving in to the urge for revenge would make her no better than those who attack her.

Other than her place in Tituba's life, the most important point to note about Hester is that she is the central character in another book, "The Scarlet Letter" by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In that narrative Hester, like Tituba, is victimized by white male Christian authority. This is the reason why the author, as she points out in the Afterword, incorporated her (Hester) into Tituba's story - to suggest that it was a desire to oppress women and not just black women at the core of Tituba's suffering.

Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo

Cohen is the Jewish merchant who, in the second half of the book, frees Tituba from prison, engages her to help him run his household, utilizes her abilities to communicate with the dead, and eventually enters into a sexual relationship with her. He is, like Hester, a kindred spirit, in that he too has been persecuted and oppressed - in his case, because he is a Jew. Where his experience diverges from those of both Hester and Tituba is that he blames himself for his misfortunes and those of others. In other words, Hester and Tituba see themselves as victims, while Cohen sees himself as being justifiably punished, mainly for disobeying what he sees as God's will.

Deodatus

Deodatus is a sailor on the boat that takes Tituba from Massachusetts back to Barbados. It is he who introduces her to what her home has become, essentially functioning as a catalyst for Tituba's evolution into the final stage of her life.

Christopher, Iphigene

Both Christopher and Iphigene are leaders of anti-white rebellions in Barbados. Both enter into sexual relationships with Tituba as she struggles to find a new place in her old homeland, both end up using and manipulating her, both end up losing their lives, and both are catalysts for important transformative events in her life. Christopher makes her pregnant, and Iphigene's involvement with both her and the rebellion eventually leads to her death.

Iphigene's name resembles that of Iphigenia, the daughter of the Ancient Greek warrior king Agamemnon. She was sacrificed to the goddess Artemis so that Agamemnon and other Greek kings could sail to Troy and gain military vengeance on that kingdom for the kidnapping of Helen (of Troy). While the narrative never explicitly notes the parallel, it's possible to see the character's name as a metaphoric suggestion that Iphigene too was/is sacrificed to enable the pursuit of what is perceived, by the sacrificer, as vengeance. In other words, in the same way that Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia to enable his revenge on Helen's kidnappers, Iphigene is sacrificed by the white, Christian holders of power in Barbados to solidify their revenge on those who would challenge that power. Here, in Iphigene's death, the author again explores the central theme commenting on the dangers and corruptive power of revenge.

Samantha

In the Epilogue, Tituba describes Samantha as the child "given" to her by the spirits of the afterworld because she (Tituba) never gave birth to a child of her own. Samantha, according to Tituba's description, is everything she would want a daughter to be - beautiful, smart, and independent, an embodiment of all the possibilities inherent not only in being born, but in being black and a woman.

Objects/Places

Barbados

This Caribbean island is the setting for the first and last parts of the novel, the homeland into which Tituba is born, in which she dies, and with which she feels a profound spiritual connection throughout her life and even beyond the point of her death.

The Darnell Plantation

This is Tituba's home for the first years of her life, the setting for her initial discovery of love (at the hands of her adoptive father, Yao) and for her traumatizing, simultaneous discoveries (triggered by her mother's execution by hanging) of death and the power of white Christianity.

Tituba's Cabin

Following the deaths of her parents and of Mama Yaya (her spiritual parent), Tituba moves to an isolated part of the Darnell plantation near a river and builds herself a small cabin. She plants a garden where she can grow her healing herbs, builds a home for some chickens, and settles herself in for a quiet life as a healer. Later, after her journey in America, she returns to the cabin in an attempt to return to that life. Both times, however, the potential peace of that life is disrupted by the arrival of men and surges, in Tituba, of sexual desire.

The Endicott Plantation

Tituba follows John Indian into his life on the Endicott Plantation, owned and run by the widowed Susanna Endicott (see "Characters"). Here Tituba is initiated into the oppressive, power-defined, master/slave relationship between white male Christianity and black female identity.

Boston

After being soled by Susanna Endicott to preacher Samuel Parris (see "Characters"), Tituba is taken to America where she spends a year in cold, dark, dank Boston. There her longings for both home and identity increase, and there she learns how to make do with local versions of the medicinally powerful plants and herbs she grew to understand back home in Barbados.

Salem

Parris moves his household (including Tituba) to this physically small, spiritually isolated, morally corrupt town in rural Massachusetts. The town is the setting for Tituba's personal, most spiritually damaging confrontations with white Christian (mostly male) power, corruption and hypocrisy.

The Salem Witch Trials

In the early 1690's, Salem was the setting for what has become a legendary series of trials. Both men and women (but mostly women) were accused of being witches (and consorting with the devil) or of aiding those so accused. Dozens of people were convicted lost their lives and/or their livelihoods as the result of these trials, which were later revealed to be the result of a combination of young people's vindictiveness and interpersonal rivalries grounded in politics, faith and family tension.

The Ipswich Prison

Following her conviction on charges of witchcraft, Tituba is put into prison in the town of Ipswich. There she makes friends with fellow prisoner (and victim of oppression) Hester (see "Characters"), and there she develops her skills and reputation of a cook, which in turn lead to her being released into the custody of Benjamin Cohen.

Plants and Herbs

Throughout the narrative, Tituba studies and relies on the healing powers of plants and herbs, substituting what she can in America for those in Barbados that she knows to be powerful. Her knowledge and use of plants and herbs is one of the most powerful pieces of evidence used against her in her trials for witchcraft.

Tituba's Bowl

During her time in Massachusetts, Tituba's longing for Barbados is so intense that she uses a bowl filled with water and herbs as a focus for her meditations, deepening her concentration so intensely that she eventually becomes able to actually see the island and its features in front of her. Later, however, as the atmosphere around her becomes more and more poisonous and she is drawn closer and closer to her trial, her ability to use the bowl deteriorates and she becomes less able to survive the various attacks on her identity and well being. In short, the bowl is a symbol (for both her and the narrative) of her home's sustaining power.

Themes

Oppression

This is the novel's primary thematic concern, an exploration of the many facets, manifestations and effects of oppression. The narrative includes examples of oppression based on race (white oppression of blacks), gender (male oppression of female) and faith (Christian oppression of non-Christian), all of which, in the book's essential perspective, are grounded in a desire for power and control as well as in narrow-minded judgment. There is the strong sense that the book's portrayals of individual suffering under such oppression (experienced most intensely by Tituba, Hester and Cohen, and to varying degrees by several other characters) are intended to be emblematic and/or metaphoric representations of the suffering undergone by the groups to which those individuals belong - again, non-whites, non-males, and non-Christians. In other words, the book is a portrayal not only of individual oppression, but of oppression of entire societies, cultures, and identities.

It's important to note, meanwhile, that while the narrative itself is a powerful condemnation of the oppressions of the time and place in which it's set, the author indicates in the Afterword that her intentions in writing the novel went beyond those particular circumstances. She clearly states that at least part of her purpose in telling Tituba's story was to draw attention to the continued existence of the oppressions she faced, and to their continued damage and/or destruction of innocent lives.

Revenge

The mirror image of oppression, at least in this narrative, is revenge, with both concept and practice becoming frequent subjects of the novel's thematic consideration. On the one hand, Tituba is frequently reminded (by Mama Yaya and by Hester) that acting on the impulse to revenge makes people in general, and would make Tituba in particular, just like the people they want to take revenge on. In other words, revenger is as eager for power and status, not to mention the suffering of another, as those who triggered the desire for revenge in the first place. This concept is also espoused, albeit more indirectly, by John Indian. His repeated comment that a slave's first duty is to survive can be seen as a suggestion that no matter how much a slave might want revenge on the master who caused his/her suffering, s/he must not give in to that want, lest their already precarious life and identity be compromised even more. Either way it's expressed, the truth and accuracy of the principle is enacted (practiced) in several ways throughout the narrative, particularly in Tituba's act of revenge upon Susanna Endicott and Iphigene's acts of revenge upon his white oppressors, both of which directly trigger increased suffering in those who take/took the revenge.

Meanwhile, the desire for revenge and the acting upon that desire manifests in several other ways as well. The witch hunt undertaken by Parris and other members of the

Salem community is eventually revealed to be an act of revenge not so much against the black slaves but against white families who, in the minds of the hunters, have slighted them. Susanna Endicott (Tituba's cursed owner), Hester (Tituba's prison companion) and the white slave owner rejected by Abena (Tituba's mother) are also motivated and driven by the desire for revenge.

Finally, it might not be going too far to suggest that the oppression against which Tituba and so many other characters struggle is itself a form of revenge, specifically revenge taken by those in power (white Christians, mostly male) on those who dare to challenge that power, either directly or by simply being different.

Birth, Death and Rebirth

The novel both begins and ends with birth - specifically, with that of Tituba and that of her surrogate, spiritual child (Samantha). In between, many of its incidents can be seen as either literal or metaphoric representations of what might be described as the inevitable cycle, of birth, death and rebirth. Examples: after her mother's death, Tituba is metaphorically reborn as the (spiritual) daughter of Mama Yaya. After Yaya's death, Tituba's independence dies (when she succumbs to her desire for John Indian) and she is reborn into the life of a slave (when she moves with John into his life as the servant of Susanna Endicott). Her experience of slavery temporarily dies when she takes her vengeance on Susanna, but is reborn when she is sold into servitude to Samuel Parris. And so on and so on until the end of her physical life at the end of a noose, at which point she is reborn into a new spiritual life, with broader and deeper understandings and perspectives. But as is the case with much of what Tituba experiences in the narrative, the author's entwined intents must be taken into account - specifically, her intent that Tituba's experiences are meant to symbolize those of any/everyone who has been oppressed, and her (the author's) intent to portray Tituba and her story in mock-heroic terms. This means that, in terms of the former, Tituba's story is clearly intended to be thematically and narratively archetypal, that suffering can be transcended and the sufferer can be reborn into a new life of peace and wisdom. In terms of the latter, the story is intended to be seen not as that of a hero, but as that of someone who simply lived, as honestly and with as much integrity as both circumstances and spirit allowed. In other words, and in terms of both aspects of the author's intent, the process of birth and rebirth is an every-day, every-life, every-circumstance, every-breath truth. It's simply the way of the world.

Style

Point of View

When considered in terms of storytelling technique, it's important to note that the narrative unfolds and is recounted from the first person, past tense point of view. In other words, protagonist and narrator are the same person - Tituba, the "black witch" of the title. As is usually the case with first person narrative, the technique establishes and develops immediacy and intimacy, drawing the reader into the experience in a more subjective way. In the case of "I, Tituba...", this narrative choice is particularly important and particularly effective. This is because a core component of the author's intent in creating the book (as indicated in the Forward and the Afterword, as much as in the narrative's content) is to awaken the reader to the system of hypocrisy and oppression that has dominated the lives of blacks, of women, of non-Christians, and of the sexually open for centuries. In other words, this is a book with an agenda, and its choice of the first person narrative perspective is an essential component of the active fulfillment of that agenda.

Another important component of point of view and authorial context is the author's background (a Caribbean ancestry shared with Tituba) and literary intent (to raise awareness of Barbadian literary efforts). Still another is the era in which the book was written and first published (the mid-1980s, a generally conservative period in which the struggle for gender and racial equality had reached a certain level of achievement but still had a substantial distance to travel). Both these aspects of context reinforce both the premise of the novel's agenda and its stylistic approaches (as defined above) in fulfilling it.

Setting

There are two main components to the novel's setting - time and place. In terms of the former, the narrative is set in the mid-to-late 1600s, a period in which both the slave trade and the white Christian socio-political environment supporting the trade flourished. These aspects of setting provide an essentially defining backdrop for the book's agenda driven narrative. There is little better time in history to explore issues relating to racial and gender discrimination than a period like the 1690s in which not only was such discrimination entrenched but acted upon (i.e., in the context of the Salem Witch Trials) in such a virulent, violent way.

The second noteworthy component of setting is place, and here there are two key locations. The first is Barbados, where Tituba begins and ends (and begins again) her life, a land where she feels instinctively that she belongs and where she feels she can not only live, but thrive. There is a sense about the Barbadian writing in "I, Tituba..." that, in spite of the oppressive state of the government and the slave economy, it was still possible for those who desired it most to achieve a kind of freedom (witness the

temporary independence experienced by Tituba on her little farm). By contrast, there is no sense at all that any sort of freedom is possible in the book's second key location, America (freedom, that is, for those who don't fall into line with the prevailing white Christian socio-political context). That country, with its history of slavery and racial/ethnic tensions, provides a backdrop that is itself a source and/or trigger of conflict in itself, never mind the characters that inhabit it. A sub-setting within that backdrop is Massachusetts which, despite its contemporary reputation as a haven of liberalism, was for decades or even centuries an area defined by its adherence to strict, Puritan Christianity. In other words, and in many ways, Salem was more American than America, the country's white Christian socio-political-spiritual distilled and intensified in the small, ultra-conservative community. In short, all the variations on this second setting, as suggested above, are effective sources and/or amplifiers of the interpersonal conflicts that drive and define the book's narrative.

Language and Meaning

There are two main points to consider in relation to the book's use of language. The first is its near-poetic sensibility, communicating images and emotions with words rich in metaphor and imagery. This sensibility functions well to reinforce the essential state of being of the central character/narrator, her lifelong connection to a world (that of spirits and nature) beyond that that triggers and sustains her physical and emotional suffering. It's also important to remember that, as the epilogue indicates, the voice of the narrator is that of a dead woman, a point that will be discussed further in this commentary.

On another level, the book's use of language might appear at first glance to be somewhat troubling. This is the sense that its vocabulary and style are far more advanced than a woman of Tituba's background (an uneducated black female slave) would realistically have available to her. Here the fact that the book's narrator is dead again comes into play. Specifically, the narrative voice is that of someone who has passed beyond the physical world and into a state of being/identity that, in many ways, can be seen as transcending the meaning not only of life but of the words defining and describing that life. In other words, the book's ultimate meaning is in some ways defined by its language. This is the premise that earthly suffering (specifically that triggered by oppression, and even more specifically white Christian oppression) can and will be transcended if and when human beings become connected fully and uncompromisingly to that which lives and lies beyond what much of humanity believes to be it: that is, the physical world.

Structure

Here again, there are two main points to consider. On a purely technical level, the narrative is structured in an essentially straightforward fashion, literally moving from beginning (i.e., Tituba's conception) through middle (i.e., Tituba's literal and spiritual trials in America) into ending (i.e., Tituba's death). However, the epilogue takes that essential, traditional structure even further, taking Tituba (and the reader) beyond death

into (at least a possibility of) what lies beyond, essentially into a new beginning. Here is another example of how the author develops her thematic exploration of the relationships between birth, death and rebirth.

The second point to consider in terms of structure relates to the author's previously discussed intention that the narrative be perceived as "mock-heroic" - that is, as a parody of stories of heroic, strong willed characters. It's important to look at the book's structure in the context of other such stories, and here it's possible to see (presumably deliberate) echoes of several elements familiar to readers of heroic/mythic narrative. These include unusual births or childhoods, the appearance and ongoing influence of a mentor figure, journeys away from home, trials and tribulations while away, the bestowing of power and/or knowledge, the return home with that knowledge, some kind of transformation resulting from the application of that knowledge, and the achievement of what might be described as a "new normal". The narrative elements and structure of "I, Tituba..." clearly follow this pattern, with the intensity of some of the circumstances and specifics of those elements fulfilling the author's stated intention of "mocking" the tradition, albeit with a very serious purpose.

Quotes

"Too many storm clouds had gathered over [Abena's] short life: her village had been burned to the ground, her parents had been stabbed to death trying to defend themselves, she had been raped, and now she had to endure this brutal separation from ... a creature as gentle and desperate as herself."
p. 4

"It seemed to [Abena] that a woman's fate was even more painful than a man's. In order to free themselves from their condition, didn't they have to submit to the will of those very men who kept them in bondage and to sleep with them?"
p. 6

"I saw men go home covered in blood, their chests and backs striped in scarlet. I even saw one of them die under my very eyes, vomiting a violet froth of blood ...everyone rejoiced because at least one of us had been delivered and was on his way home."
p. 7

"They hanged my mother. All the slaves had been summoned to her execution. Once her neck had been broken and her soul had departed, there rose up a clamor of anger and revolt that the overseers silenced with great lashes of their whips ... I felt something harden inside me like lava; a feeling that was never to leave me, a mixture of terror and mourning."
p. 8

"The dead only die if they die in our hearts. They live on if we cherish them and honor their memory ... they are all around us, eager for attention, eager for affection. A few words are enough to conjure them back and to have their invisible bodies pressed against ours in their eagerness to make themselves useful."
p. 10

"My God, how this man could laugh! And as each note rang out, a locked compartment burst open in my heart."
p. 16

"Isn't the ability to communicate with the invisible world, to keep constant links with the dead, to care for others and heal, a superior gift of nature that inspires respect, admiration, and gratitude? Consequently, shouldn't the witch ... be cherished and revered rather than feared?"
p. 17

"My mother had been raped by a white man. She had been hanged because of a white man ... My adoptive father had committed suicide because of a white man. Despite all that, I was considering living among white men again, in their midst, under their

domination. And all because of an uncontrollable desire for a mortal man."
p. 19

"You would think I wasn't standing there at the threshold of the room. They were talking about me and yet ignoring me. They were striking me off the map of human beings. I was a nonbeing. Invisible. More invisible than the unseen, who at least have powers that everyone fears. Tituba only existed insofar as these women let her exist. It was atrocious."
p. 24

"'Even if she does die ... you will have perverted your heart into the bargain. You will have become like them, knowing only how to kill and destroy.'"
p. 30

"Mama Yaya had left his mortal sphere too early to initiate me into the third degree of knowledge ... although I could communicate with the forces of the invisible world and change the present with their help, I was unable to decipher the future."
p. 34

"Sometimes an arid, desolate soil produces a bloom of sweet colors that perfumes and enhances the surrounding landscape. I can only compare to such a flower the friendship that soon united me with Goodwife Paris and little Betsey."
p. 41

"How strange it is, this love of our own country. We carry it in us like our blood and vital organs. We only need to be separated from our native land to feel a pain that never loses its grip welling up inside us."
p. 48

"I screamed, and the more I screamed the more I felt the desire to scream. To scream out my suffering, my revolt, and my powerless rage. What kind of a world was this that had turned me into a slave, an orphan, and an outcast? What kind of a world that had taken me away from my own people? That had forced me to live among people who did not speak my language and who did not share my religion in their forbidding, unwelcoming land?"
p. 49

"There is no happiness in motherhood for a slave. It is little more than the expulsion of an innocent baby, who will have no chance to change its fate, into a world of slavery and abjection."
p. 50

"Wasn't Abigail [Betsey's] only playmate? And wasn't she but a child? A child could not be dangerous."
p. 55

"The bowl of water managed to encompass the entire island, with the swell of the sea merging into the waves of the sugarcane fields ... although I had trouble making out the

inhabitants, I could see the hills clearly, the cabins, the sugar mills, and the ox carts whipped on by invisible hands ... and all that moved silently at the bottom of my bowl of water."
p. 62

"Plunging Betsey into this scalding hot bath, it seemed to me that these same hands, that not long ago had dealt death were now giving life, and I was purifying myself of the murder of my child."
p. 63

"'[e]vil is a gift received at birth. There's no acquiring it. Those of us who have not come into this world armed with spurs and fangs are losers in every combat."
p. 73

"Would they finally speak to me, my life-giving forces? I needed them. I no longer had my island. I only had my man. I had had to kill my child. I needed them, they who had brought me into this world."
p. 85.

"Our body is mortal, and we are therefore prey to every torment of the common mortal. Like them, we fear suffering. Like them, we are frightened of the terrible antechamber that ends our life on earth. However certain we are that the doors will open before us onto another form of life ... we are nevertheless racked with anguish."
p. 86

"[t]he impression I had was indescribable. There was rage. There was a desire to kill. There was pain, especially pain. I was the poor idiot who had sheltered these vipers in her bosom, offering up my breast to their triangular shaped jaws and their forked tongues."
p. 90

"Sometimes my fear was like a baby in its mother's womb. It turns from left to right, then kicks around. Sometimes my fear was like a wicked bird tearing out my liver with its beak. Sometimes it was like a boa constrictor suffocating me with its coils."
p. 102

"Mother, will our torture never end? If this is how things are, 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. I shall cling so tightly you'll never expel me and I shall return to dust without you, without ever having known the curse of day. Mother, help me!"
p. 111

"Life would only be a gift if each of us could choose the womb that carried us. But to be deposited inside a wretch, an egoist, or a self-centered bitch who makes us pay for the misfortunes of her own life, or to belong to the cohort of the exploited and humiliated, those whose name, language and religion are imposed upon them, oh what a martyrdom!"
p. 120

"I had to learn how to walk again. Deprived of my shackles, I was unable to find my balance and I tottered like a woman drunk on cheap liquor. I had to learn how to speak again, how to communicated with my fellow creatures ... I had to learn how to look them in the eyes again ..."
p. 122

"The truth always arrives too late because it walks slower than lies. Truth crawls at a snail's pace."
p. 129

"[s]ome men who have the virtue of being weak instill in us the desire to be a slave!"
p. 140

"I had already regretted having played only a minor role in the whole affair and having had a fate that no one could remember ... a few lines in the many volumes written on the Salem witch trials. Why was I going to be ignored ... is it because nobody cares about a Negress and her trials and tribulations?"
p. 149

"Our islands have two sides to them. The side of the masters' carriages and their constables on horseback, armed with muskets and savage, baying hounds. And the other, mysterious, and secret side, composed of passwords, whispers, and a conspiracy of silence. It was on this side that I lived, protected by common collusion."
p. 156

"My daughter would settle old scores for me! She would know how to win the love of a man with a heart as warm as corn bread. He would be faithful to her. They would have children they would teach to see beauty in themselves. Children who would grow straight and free towards the sky."
p. 167

"I knew that more and more and more slave ships were unloading their cargo ... and that America was preparing to dominate the world with the sweat of our brows ... what was John Indian doing in that country that was so hard on us? So hard on the weak, on the dreamers, and on those who do not judge men by their wealth?"
p. 170

"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. It's in their heads. In their hearts and in their heads."
p. 176

"This constant and extraordinary symbiosis is my revenge for my long solitude in the deserts of America. A vast, cruel land where the spirits only beget evil! Soon the will be covering their faces with hoods, the better to torture us. They will lock up our children behind the heavy gates of the ghettos. They will deny us our rights and blood will beget blood."
p. 178

"[t]his child of mine has learned to recognize my presence in the twitching of an animal's coat, the crackling of a fire between four stones, the rainbow-hued babbling of the river, and the sound of the wind as it whistles through the great trees on the hills."
p. 179

Topics for Discussion

In what ways do Tituba's other relationships echo her relationship with John Indian - specifically, in the way they begin with love, become a source of support and comfort, and end up being corrupted by outside influences such as faith, money, or power? Discuss the specific ways in which the transformation of her relationship with John is echoed in other transformations in other relationships.

Discuss John Indian's frequent comment to Tituba that a slave's first duty is to survive. Is that not true of any human being, not just slaves? Do you believe that survival should continue at any cost (morally, sexually, personally, politically, spiritually)? Why or why not? Is life worth living on its own merits, even if it is under the yoke of some kind of oppression? Or is a free life the only life worth living?

Obtain and study a copy of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible", in which several of the characters in this novel also appear. What are the similarities between the two works (thematic, character, narrative)? What are the differences? What are the similarities/differences in overall impact between the two works?

Research and discuss the authorial perspectives of the authors of "The Crucible" and "I, Tituba". In what ways do you think the different perspectives and/or backgrounds of the writers contributed to the different takes on the characters and situations of both works?

Discuss whether Tituba's decision to abort her child is, under the circumstances, morally right or morally reprehensible. For reference, see the quote on p. 50.

Discuss the various mother/child relationships in the book - biological (such as Abena/Tituba, among several others), spiritual (Yaya/Tituba, Tituba/Samantha), and the emotional (Tituba/Betsey, Tituba/Iphigene). What are the specific qualities of each relationship? What does each relationship in particular suggest about mother/child relationships in general? What is the role/place of race in each relationship? What is the role/place of gender?

Obtain and study information relating to "The Scarlet Letter" in which Hester is the main character. In what ways does her story parallel Tituba's? In what ways does it differ? In what ways does the portrayal of the character in the original differ from the portrayal here? Why do you think the author of "I, Tituba..." portrayed Hester the way she did here?

Chart the narrative movement of "I, Tituba..." in relation to the principles and patterns of mythic/heroic structure as outlined in "Style - Structure". For further reference, consult Joseph Campbell's "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" or Christopher Vogler's "The Writer's Journey".

Consider and discuss ways in which the various oppressions portrayed in the book (defined by race, gender and faith) continue in contemporary society. In what ways are

blacks still oppressed? women? non-Christians? people with perspectives on sexuality outside the "traditional" (i.e., Hester)?