
Destabilizing Salem: Maryse ondé Recycles The Crucible

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Abstract

American artists have been revisiting Arthur Miller's 1953 Tony Award-winning play *The Crucible* practically since it was first produced. First adapted for film in 1957, opera in 1961, and television in 1968, Arthur Miller's depiction of the Salem witch trials continues to haunt the American imagination. However, few of the many retellings of this moment in American history examine the events from the perspective of a black female slave. Caribbean author Maryse ondé's 1986 novel *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (translated from the French in 1992) provides a counter-narrative of American colonial history by bringing a heretofore underexamined character to the foreground: Tituba, a real-life slave from the Barbados who was in service to the Reverend Samuel Parris in the late 17th century. I argue that by recycling Miller's work Condé destabilizes the original text, and insists that we grapple with the transnational and racial politics typically lost in our discourse on the witch trials. *I, Tituba* importantly links Salem to the Caribbean, raising questions about unofficial histories, subaltern voices, and colonial authority. Condé craftily rewrites the historical record, providing her eponymous character with a background in Caribbean healing arts and an assertive pronoun in the very title, allowing her to both claim agency and reimagine what "witchcraft" might mean. However, the novel also parodies the Puritan culture and our assumptions about it, providing a critique of the "original" Salem witch trial narrative. But for Condé, the act of recycling not only illuminates the racism and hypocrisy of the colonial era, it crucially asks that the reader reconsider our own moment under the same terms.

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