MARYSE CONDÉ’S *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* brings the textual framework back to the Caribbean and back to a genre of slave narrative with a revision of the story surrounding Tituba, the slave who was the third person to be accused of witchcraft during the 1692–93 Salem witch trials. Like Mary Prince’s narrative, which was subjected to ideological and editorial revision depending on who was characterizing Prince, the details of Tituba’s story are fodder for historical and anthropological debate. She thus quite literally represents the rejection of sociohistorical and literary authenticity that I have traced throughout this book. Even her race remains in question. Condé sets her squarely within Barbados, even as the self-identifying title allows Salem to lay at least a contextual claim to her. Casting her home in the Caribbean, Condé locates Tituba in a nexus of creolization, inviting readings of racial ambiguity and ethnic hybridity. In this way, location “races” Tituba in significant ways, disallowing a singular or stable identification. Nonetheless, Tituba is classified as “Indian,” with scholars like Elaine Breslaw specifically suggesting that she was an Arawak Indian. Other historical accounts refer to her as a “Spanish Indian,” which then would have set her place of origin in the very contexts of *Their Eyes* and *Mama Day*: Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas. In the face of details about her life that are less than specific, these critical speculations make static claims to an authentic Tituba
through a troublesome preoccupation with the character’s racial classification. *I, Tituba* situates a narrative that was never able to be written and, in so doing, exemplifies the notion of history as inventions or fictions. Accordingly, the many critical appeals to the authentic voice that Tituba exercises within the text are at best misplaced.

First published as *Moi, Tituba, sorcière . . . Noire de Salem* in 1986, the book was published in English translation in the United States in 1992. Combining fiction and first-person slave account, Condé offers Tituba’s story as something of a mock slave narrative. As such, it resonates with the major strands of slavery, migration, labor, and oppression found in Mary Prince’s narrative. It also presents Tituba’s story through an authorial lens that plays a role not so dissimilar to that of Mary Prince’s amanuensis, Susanna Strickland. Once again, we are able to see authorial agendas and emphases subtly manipulating the narrative that aims to recuperate a woman’s experience. While Mary Prince’s narrative is a traditional example of the slave narrative genre, written as a contemporary text of Afro-Caribbean slave experiences, Condé’s is a fictionalized exercise in telling a similar story. In *Something Akin to Freedom*, Stephanie Li sustains a focus on “postbellum forms of bondage” and discusses the ways in which recent narratives render the repercussions of that trauma on women. In reference to the projects of writers like Gayl Jones and Toni Morrison, Li mentions Bernard W. Bell’s term “neoslave narratives,” which he applied in the 1980s to novels by African American writers dealing with contexts of slavery. She challenges the terminology, suggesting, “Although the neoslave narrative is now understood as a distinct literary form, I prefer Angelyn Mitchell’s term ‘liberatory narrative’ to refer to ‘a contemporary novel that engages the historical period of chattel slavery in order to provide new models of liberation by problematizing the concept of freedom’” (87–88). Li favors the term because, among other things, it emphasizes the ways that the narratives analyze freedom rather than merely describing the journey from enslavement to freedom. In a similar fashion, I find productive an analysis of how the migrations and displacements in Prince’s *History* and Condé’s *I, Tituba* shape the constructions of gender and labor identity. In the case of Tituba, migration frames her thoughts on womanhood, desire, and her work as a witch. Her choices and removals throughout the text, for example her decision to become a slave in order to marry John Indian, thus result in a certain emotional, as well as geographical, fluidity and flux.

As in the critical literature surrounding the books in my project, the issue of voice has maintained a significant place in scholarship dealing
with Condé’s text—Tituba’s acquisition of voice, Tituba’s voice in relation to Condé’s, and/or Tituba’s voice as representative of a larger collective of Caribbean women. Indeed, before even the foreword, Condé invites this by offering the following by way of explanation: “Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else” (v). As a pseudo slave narrative, made of such conversation rather than dictation, I, Tituba is thus not only Condé’s critique ultimately of Puritan—that is, Anglo-American colonial—intolerance but also her attempt to resurrect awareness of the woman who allegedly confessed to practicing witchcraft in order to save her life. However, while some believe Condé to be fully yielding her own authority over the text and bestowing Tituba with a powerful sense of voice, Tituba’s first-person subject position (as well as the agency literary critics typically associate with it) is consistently challenged, if not undercut, throughout the narrative by the very author inviting her to speak. Thus, even as the title itself is a definitive, what Angela Davis calls a “strong, self-affirming,” assertion of her personhood—I, Tituba—Tituba’s story does not hover in isolation as a simple, unfettered, or unstructured truth. That is, it is still very much “author-ized.” And while this fact does not escape critics who have written on this text (certainly they understand the various strands of genre and authorship at work in the novel), their frequent appeals to the monolithic importance of the unique and authoritative voice that Tituba is thought to possess or inhabit suggest otherwise.

In the context of I, Tituba, I do not believe the challenge to Tituba’s autonomy to be accidental, as if Condé wanted to rescue an authentic narrative for Tituba as a historical figure but could not help but to intersperse her own strands of contemporary social critique, intertextuality, and revisionism. On the contrary, I see I, Tituba as a possible way to reimagine the genre of the slave narrative and to rethink conventions of witchcraft and captivity. While the text purports to be a first-person account of the travails Tituba endures as a slave, relayed by a translator interested in presenting the narrative as a social critique, Condé interrogates categories even as she constructs them. Specifically, she simultaneously establishes and undermines a specific understanding of gender performativity with the second-wave feminist rhetoric that comes from the anachronistic Hester Prynne, with whom Tituba shares a prison cell. Furthermore, Condé uses conflicting definitions of “witch” to complicate notions of “a woman’s work.” Along with the obvious ways in which the term gets leveled against her, there is an internal sense of pride
that Tituba enjoys in relation to her status as witch. When she passes Salem’s residents attempting to divine the best uses for this or that herb, Tituba laughs to herself:

Once or twice while wandering through the forest I met some of the villagers bending awkwardly over herbs and plants, their deceitful faces revealing the schemes in their hearts. I got great amusement from this. The art of doing evil is a complex one. If it is based on the knowledge of plants, this must be combined with the power to act on the unseen forces, which are rebellious by nature, transient as air, and need to be invoked. Not just anyone can set herself up as a witch! (67)

In this way, I, Tituba resonates with Their Eyes Were Watching God and Mama Day, making similar productive misuse of formations of gender roles and “a woman’s work” that appear in those texts.\(^3\)

I, Tituba also lends itself to comparative analyses—at least in the vein of interrogating categories of witchcraft and the supernatural in relation to performative spaces of race, gender, and work—with readings of the novel alongside those like Toni Morrison’s Sula and Song of Solomon. In the former, one might look to Ajax’s mother—a conjure woman of whom Sula reminds the elusive Ajax. In the latter, Pilate is worth noting as the goddesslike sister of Macon Dead Jr., born without a navel and read as a representation of the so-called mystical or divine. In the arena of critical analysis, Karen Fields and Barbara Fields provide a useful look at how inequality and ideology intersect to forge what they call “racecraft”—a term “highlight[ing] the ability of pre- or non-scientific modes of thought to hijack the minds of the scientifically literate” (5–6). In doing so, they offer a comparative study at one point in their book of racecraft and witchcraft, both relying on, to their way of seeing, a particular “invisible ontology.” They effectively invert a common way of thinking such that, rather than seeing race giving rise to racism, we might think of racism as providing the cause for the subsequent effect of manufactured and illusory notions of race. In the course of Condé’s novel, this is certainly the case. The actions surrounding Tituba’s being interpreted as witch provide a foundation on which reflections on her race and gender are built.

In the sequence of the novel, after being tried for witchcraft, being imprisoned, and finally returning home to her island, Tituba thinks about her legacy and how her story will be remembered by history if it is at all. She asks about rather than affirms what will become her memory: “And
what about me, is there a song for me? A song for Tituba?” (153). My examination of the conditions and limitations that Condé imposes on Tituba’s “voice” follows the basic direction taken in my readings of Prince, Hurston, and Naylor. Specifically, Tituba’s attachment to and removal from place serve to frame the novel in which Condé casts certain contextual formations of gender and labor. In this chapter, I look at the presentations of “home” as related to history and nation, relationships among women, sexuality, maternity, and the work of witchcraft in order to offer a more critical answer to the question of whether there is, as Condé puts it, a “song for Tituba.” The appeals to home echo the way in which this trope appears in Naylor’s *Mama Day* as a shifting, fluid entity with different definitions depending on one’s considerations. With this in mind, while Condé ensures that there is a song for her, the proverbial tune should not be perceived as or conflated with a song by her, as some scholars would suggest. Indeed, regardless of the preposition, the “her” in relation to song is contingent, constructed only in and through discourse about her. After discussing what I perceive to be, consequently, generally narrow critical interpretations of Tituba’s voice, I offer a brief analysis of Tituba’s own imagined desire for more complicated tools to articulate meaning for what are otherwise inhibiting categories of identification. This desire is evident when one examines the geographical migrations through the novel. They show how Condé manipulates Tituba’s voice in order to effect broader understandings of tropes like “home,” “sexuality,” “maternity,” and “work”—understandings which ultimately critique the very meanings of freedom and autonomy.

Like much of the criticism surrounding the texts I have so far discussed in this book, critical readings of Condé’s *I, Tituba* make appeals to voice and tout, occasionally cavalierly, what they see to be the broad implications of reading Tituba as a powerful, speaking subject. In her article “Giving a Voice to Tituba: The Death of the Author?” Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi investigates Tituba’s voice in relation to Condé’s and argues that Condé willfully abdicates authorial authority: “In withdrawing to the unauthorial position of an interpreter and mediator, Condé ensures the *authenticity* of the character’s voice” (753, emphasis mine). She later puts it another way: “In textualizing Tituba as an ‘I,’ a subject, the writer withdraws her own authority from the narrative” (753). The notion of authenticity, I suggest, is more complicated than what Mudimbé-Boyi allows. She argues, “The authenticity of her voice is preserved thanks to specific narrative strategies implemented
by Condé: self-effacement and subversion, interplay with the subject pronouns, and the creation of an autobiographical narrative” (754). Of course, Tituba is unable to access any sort of authenticity if doing so requires a commitment to realness or truth. Whether imagined or real, like Mary Prince, she has multiple degrees of separation from the voice that would tell her story.

In Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture, Françoise Lionnet offers a discussion of Hurston’s Dust Tracks on a Road and Condé’s Heremakhonon. Read alongside one another, the texts receive a useful rendering through Lionnet’s lens of autobiography theory. She suggests that “Hurston and Condé are consumed by the need to find their past, to trace lineages that will empower them to live in the present, to rediscover the histories occluded by History” (25–26). That Hurston and Condé may have an expressed interest in projects of reclamation or rediscovery is not in itself the analytical sine qua non for discussions of diasporic women writers. More productive would be for scholars to ask what kind of work such rhetoric does for the authors and texts reproducing it. There is the tempting presumption to “allow” the texts—especially those written in first-person narrative voice—to “speak for themselves,” to give one’s analysis over to the presumed intentionality of the author. To that end, Lionnet says the following:

I try to derive my interpretive strategies from the texts themselves rather than to adopt a single theoretical lens from the vast array of critical approaches available to the contemporary critic. This approach enables me to analyze the ways in which rhetorical structures produce meaning and to elucidate the process whereby text and context can ultimately be derived from the linguistic structures interacting on different levels of textual productions . . . I try never to impose a theoretical grid on the text; instead, I draw from it the means of theorizing its own process of production. (27–28)

As enticing as it is to think of first-person narrative as allowing access to the memories and memoirs of a marginalized subject, Houston Baker in The Journey Back calls to our attention the simple but piercing question “How reliable are such [autobiographical] acts?” (27). Citing some notable voices critical of autobiographical veracity, Baker proceeds to launch an incisive examination of just how precarious the particularities of first-person narration proved for slave voices. Using Frederick Douglass’s Narrative as an example, Baker notes, “the nature of the autobiog-
raper’s situation seemed to force him to move to a public version of the self—one molded by the values of white America” (39). The appeal to a close consideration of text as context (rather than “and” context, as if they exist as separate entities) here is key.

The contextual framework at work in the novel—namely Tituba’s migrations to and from her homeland—is what challenges appeals to authenticity at every turn. While much of the criticism on Condé’s work pays a great deal of attention to the symbolism and importance of the Caribbean as a cultural context, relatively little time is spent on the geographical specificity and uniqueness of migrations in her novels. One notable exception is Mildred Mortimer’s “A Sense of Place and Space in Maryse Condé’s Les derniers rois mages.” In her essay, Mortimer uses Condé’s 1992 novel Les derniers rois mages (The Last Magi) to examine what she suggests is a key element of Caribbean literature, namely “a tension between place and space, rootedness and freedom” (758).

Mortimer rightly distinguishes between the two terms “place” and “space,” which, she notes, are “often used interchangeably” (758). Interesting in relation to I, Tituba is the tension to which Mortimer refers, although the text does not offer so easy a binary as place/space. “Rootedness and freedom,” to use Mortimer’s terms, are not so isolated as they might seem. She is right to caution against quick conflation of “place” and “space”; however, these do not so easily or predictably transfer to power relations and differentiations such that “place” equals stability or “rootedness” and “space” equals liberation. The Caribbean presents complex layers of history and memory, of slavery and postcolonial imagination. As Françoise Lionnet contends in Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity, Caribbean narratives by women often obscure the boundary between “self” and “other” through a serious handling of métissage, or cultural interchange and mixing. It is these layers, especially as they manipulate constructs of gender and labor—Tituba’s womanhood and sexuality alongside her work as a witch—that offer opportunities to rethink the role of displacement that leaves Tituba, as well as the women in the other narratives discussed in this project, neither rooted nor free.

Interesting to the specific production and reception of I, Tituba, the travels in the text mirror the travels of the text. Like the societal influences and cultural context that shaped Prince’s narrative, various editions of I, Tituba were published in different places with their own cultural agendas. Starting out in France within the genre of histoire Romanesque and its attendant white female readership, it landed in the hands of American readers as a narrative of feminist and racial redemption—a recuper-
ated story of an oppressed woman reclaiming her voice." Thus, Tituba’s story, like Prince’s (and, indeed, like any literary work), is not immune to the publication and production concerns of her editors. Lillian Manzor-Coats, in “Of Witches and Other Things: Maryse Condé’s Challenges to Feminist Discourse,” rightly parallels Tituba’s travels with those of the text:

If Tituba’s travels from Barbados to New England are part of the history of slavery and colonialism in the Americas, the travels of Condé’s Tituba from the author’s native Guadeloupe to France . . . and now to the United States with the English translation are also symptomatic of a colonial and neocolonial history in the twentieth century. (738)

Such comparisons and implications are more productive to feminist and postcolonial inquiries than are analyses that would simply perpetuate an insistence on the importance of voice in its own right.

Mudimbé-Boyi argues that Condé grants Tituba a voice merely by allowing her to “tell her story in her own words” (751). This definition of an independent voice that identifies it solely on the basis of the ability to tell a story seems problematic. So, too, does the notion that “Tituba unfolds a long monologic ‘conversation’ in which the writer becomes the simple listener of a narrating subject telling her own life story” (Mudimbé-Boyi 752). Mudimbé-Boyi argues that Condé “has completely disappeared,” but I see her presence, especially as she frames the story ideologically, as remaining prominent throughout the text (752). This seems especially the case when considering Condé’s own words. Manzor-Coats cites one of Condé’s interviews in which she explains that she did not set out to write a “historical novel.” Condé says of the persona she creates, “I was not interested at all in what her real life could have been . . . I really invented Tituba. I gave her a childhood, an adolescence, an old age. At the same time I wanted to turn Tituba into a sort of female hero, an epic heroine, like the legendary ‘Nanny of the maroons’” (qtd. in Manzor-Coats 738). Condé thus presents herself as a creator with an agenda and Tituba as a creation of this agenda.10 Any notion of Tituba’s voice, therefore, needs to take this authorial presentation and inevitably laden readership into account. This is not to say, of course, that the constructed Tituba is inconsequential. I am not suggesting that the artifice of Tituba’s presence as a self renders a sense of voice entirely absent. In fact, I agree with Manzor-Coats, who says that Tituba’s first-person narration “destabiliz[es] Condé’s own authorial position” (737). Condé, then, is
simultaneously present and destabilized, just as Tituba is both a speaking subject and a speaker subjected to decisive agendas and ideologies outside her narrative. Thus, the conversation between Tituba and Condé is more a dialogic experience than the monologic kind that Mudimbé-Boyi presents.

On the further extreme of a “sole” narrator, criticism of I, Tituba also often speaks to what scholars see as the broader cultural implications of the text. Mudimbé-Boyi argues that Condé’s protagonist “is certainly speaking of herself, but her narrative also tells the story of many other black women who, like her, have been relegated to the margins of history, if not erased from it, reduced to invisibility and silence” (753). According to such an analysis, “Tituba, in reconstructing one individual’s story, also allegorizes the collective history of the Caribbean” (755). However, I read Tituba’s story as a much more intricate quest of individualized meaning-making. Throughout the novel, she dwells in paradox and contradiction as she searches for ways to interpret subjective experiences outside categorical fixity. My reading departs from a postmodern analysis that would focus solely and simply on the blurring of historical narrative and fiction or on the hybrid constitution of the character Tituba inasmuch as my discussion attempts to cast doubt on an approach that would suggest a knowable “Tituba” in the first place. Any effort to place “her”—geographically, ethnically, or otherwise—is an immediately flawed and even impossible endeavor.

Tituba herself makes her desire for a complex assessment of her own story most apparent on her trip back to Barbados after leaving America and the events in Salem. On the ship returning to Barbados, the sailor Deodatus approaches Tituba and at once confronts and conflates her with her familial history: “They tell me your name is Tituba. Aren’t you the daughter of Abena, who killed a white man?” (136). While she worries that histories of the witch trials will recall her merely as “a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing ‘hoodoo,’” she casts in contradistinction Western historical apparatuses and what seems to her the Caribbean people’s ironic penchant for remembering (110). She intimates, “Having someone recognize me after ten years of absence brought tears to my eyes. I had forgotten this ability our people have of remembering. Nothing escapes them! Everything is engraved in their memory!” (136). Upon affirming her name, the sailor sympathetically tells her, “I hear they gave you a difficult time over there” (137). His strange knowledge causes Tituba to “burst into tears,” and he tries to soothe her by saying, “You’re alive, Tituba. That’s all that matters” (137). This is an echo
of the sentiments of John Indian, that “the duty of a slave is to survive” (22) and that “the important thing is to survive” (92). It also reiterates what Tituba recalls from Mama Yaya, that “what matters is to survive” (136). She reacts strongly to Deodatus: “I shook my head violently. No, it wasn’t all that mattered. Life, life had to be given a new meaning. But how?” (137). Rejecting the philosophy of staying alive at any cost, Tituba looks to reinterpret and reconfigure the systems surrounding her rather than merely dwelling within them.

As Deodatus comforts Tituba with folklore, telling her “why the sky moved away from the land” and “why the palm tree is the king of trees,” Tituba feels that “exile, suffering, and sickness had combined in such a way as to make me almost forget these simple stories” (137). Thus, the inherent complexity of Tituba’s circumstance is one that disallows a chance for her to apply easy interpretations to narratives. The “new meaning,” then, that must be given to life is, for her, one that necessitates questioning and revising systems that would impose specificity or linearity. Thus, the presumed voice throughout the text, whether it belongs more to Tituba or, more likely the case, to Condé, recurrently focuses on reconstituting new definitions for signs in light of the old—often narrow—interpretations. It is a voice that goes about the business of finding new meanings, attempting to impose ambiguity onto fixed spaces and allow for more options in considering ideas like “witch,” “work,” “home,” “sexuality,” and “woman.” Thus Condé embarks on a critical and revisionist project in her novel by complicating Tituba’s relationship to Barbados, by giving meaning—through a sustained inquiry into sexuality and a series of strong ties to other women—to an otherwise abject body, and by attempting to redefine witchcraft in terms of distinctive (and distinctively gendered) labor.

The work that Condé does with signs of gender and labor is situated in Tituba’s travels away from and back to her home in Barbados. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Condé plays with the pedestrian uses of complex notions related to place—nations like “history” and “diaspora”—and infuses productive ambiguity into each. There are several kinds of history operating in Condé’s project as the author and in Tituba’s own journey. First, there is the literal, documented sort of history that Condé uses as an impetus for writing the novel in the first place and for recuperating a story lost to the holes left in historical accounts, whether these holes are the result of deliberate intent or of more systemic privilege and power. Second, there is the hypothetical (or future tense of one’s) history, of how one will be remembered once one’s own story becomes a
part of history. This is the type to which Tituba refers in her skepticism surrounding the question of what part, if any, she will play in the history that is yet to be written. Alongside this anxiety is a third presentation of history that Condé uses to deal in broader terms with the notion of a history of a people. While I am not convinced that Tituba’s story is somehow representative of an entire collective of Caribbean women (and why should it be?), Condé does impart a particular interest in what it means to explore the personal and individual narrative of someone whose history is necessarily freighted with a shared experience of oppression and forced migration. By adding layers of complexity to a term like “witch,” Condé demonstrates how words like “history” and “diaspora” should also be rethought in order to give a fuller account of those whom these ideas marginalize.

In an interview published in the afterword of *I, Tituba*, Condé tells Ann Armstrong Scarboro that “history” for people of the African diaspora is a difficult term in its traditional Anglo-European singularity. The focus of black history, she argues, is not only myopic but also troublingly and inextricably linked to colonialism and slavery (to maintain contextual solidarity, I include her full statement):

As I said, for a black person, history is a challenge because a black person is supposed not to have any history except the colonial one. We hardly know what happened to our people before the time when they met the Europeans who decided to give them what they call civilization. For a black person from the West or from Africa, whatever, for somebody from the diaspora, I repeat it is a kind of challenge to find out exactly what was there before. It is not history for the sake of history. It is searching for one’s self, searching for one’s identity, searching for one’s origin in order to better understand oneself. (203–4)

Condé is rightly critical of the dominant ideology that traces black history to slavery and colonization. However, this critique is easily problematic in itself. If we take Condé’s version to its logical end, we are still left with the question of what part colonization indeed should play in thinking about black history. There cannot merely be a quick and quiet erasure of the power structures put in place that subsequently shaped generations. While this does not seem entirely to be what Condé is suggesting, the problem of diasporic history she presents here is an important point to consider. This is why—far from merely a clever comparative analysis—it is productive on the level of theory to include discussions of figures like Mary Prince
and Tituba alongside Janie Crawford and other “troublesome” characters. These women engage in discursive alternatives to the problem that Condé presents. The traversal of eras and genres, the commingling of history and fiction, and the negotiations of different geographical spaces allow for a way to both engage and move beyond the theoretical singularity inherent in reducing discussions of black history and diaspora to colonization and slavery. Thus, colonial terms prove too narrow. More layers need to be engaged in an attempt to approach and understand a “history.”

As Tituba mulls over her complex relationship to both her personal and contextual histories, she constructs an understanding of herself through a sustained consideration of her national identity, at least inasmuch as such an identity would be constructed during the seventeenth century. “History” thus begins to converge with an understanding of “home,” offering place and movement as key reference points in a reading of her narrative. Her own persona is transmogrified into the characteristics of Barbados, manifesting itself as the island of its origin. In this way, she is like Miranda Day, who, as mentioned in the last chapter, becomes a very tangible part of the woods in Willow Springs. This interrelation between Tituba and her home is ultimately what allows her to believe that there is in fact a song for her, a positive remembrance of who she was and a legacy that she can appreciate. In the epilogue, she celebrates this inversion of island and identity through her daughter:

For this 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. (179)

Before she is able to actualize her legacy as a living presence in and through the island, Tituba ponders the meanings of the very notions of country and home. First, she contemplates the way in which one’s country makes itself part of one’s sense of self. She thinks of this idea especially in relation to migration and removal: “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” (48). Here, one’s country is not only a place of departure and return but also an anthropomorphized physical presence. Comparing it to “blood and vital organs,” Tituba, furthermore, understands it as the necessary inner workings of the body that carries it. Upon arrival back in “her country,” however, Tituba encounters a more
particular concern of “home.” As soon as Tituba returns to Barbados, she finds herself mourning the loss of her relationship with John Indian. The spirit of Abena reprimands her daughter’s preoccupation with “that wretch” and tells her to “go home” (142). Tituba immediately launches into yet another linguistic quandary: “Home! There was a cruel irony in this word. Apart from a handful of dead people, nobody was waiting for me on this island and I didn’t even know whether the cabin I had squatted in ten years earlier was still standing” (142). At work here is what she calls an “irony” that results from the dissonance between the definition of “home” she maintainsimaginatively—one that offers close relationships and a sense of origins—and the home she actually encounters. A fixed definition does not stand in the text.

Thus, Tituba’s first day back in Barbados is full of the multiple ambiguities that Condé presents in order to unhinge singular constructions of nation and homeland. Present are both this ambiguity and a conflation of terms. As tropes become more slippery, “nature” and “man” become directly proportional in their benevolence and wrath. And Tituba positions this realization against the backdrop of her travels—in this instance, her being back home again. She thinks, “Yes, nature changes her language according to the land, and curiously, her language harmonizes with that of man. Savage nature, savage men! Protecting, well-meaning nature, openhearted and generous men! My first night on my island!” (147). Tituba accordingly juxtaposes the seeming duplicity of men with the return to the island, onto which she imposes a possessive pronoun. Thus, on the first night back on what she considers to be her island, she muses about the ambiguity swirling within the midst of both nature and men. Here again we see, through Tituba’s supposed voice, Condé’s commingling of place and gender foregrounded by Tituba’s migration.

Tituba’s migrations have much to say and show about her relationships with others. Lawrence R. Rodgers asks in Canaan Bound, “How have migrants forged and retained human relations?” (4). This question is key in my own study of migration literature; however, my focus lies more specifically on the relationships between (or among communities of) women to show a particularly gendered expression of relational solidarity in the midst of regional flux. In the context of Condé’s novel, although Tituba is “too fond of love” with men, she nonetheless remains emotionally linked to Mama Yaya, Abena, and Hester Prynne (101). She even forms short-lived but strong relationships with the wives of her masters, Elizabeth Parris and, on an arguably more tenuous level, Benjamin’s wife, Abigail.
On the boat to America, Tituba and Elizabeth Parris fashion an unlikely bond. Significantly, much of their affinity for one another is a result of their conversation on gender and sexuality. However, alongside these intimations of the pains suffered by women is Elizabeth’s initial appreciation of Tituba’s journey: “So you’re Tituba? How cruel it must be to be separated from your own family. From your father, your mother, and your people” (38). The narrative fusion of geographical and gendered flux is one that complicates the otherwise simple relationship between mistress and slave. While there is an impassable distance between them racially and economically, there is a closeness that they appreciate on the level of being women. Seeing that Elizabeth is not well, Tituba asks her from what ailment she suffers. Elizabeth explains with a litany of profoundly gendered hardships: “All I know is that my life is a martyrdom . . . I am taken with nausea as if I were pregnant, whereas Heaven has seen fit to grace me with only one child. Sometimes unbearable pains stab my stomach. My menstruation is a torture and my feet are constantly like two blocks of ice” (38). Then, motioning for Tituba to sit, Elizabeth tells her, “How lovely you are, Tituba” (38). The idea of not understanding one’s condition, as Mary Prince iterates, is important here. She “unbelievingly” mutters “Lovely?” and as soon as a physicality is assigned to her, as a condition is spoken into existence, loyalty is prompted out of Tituba (39). She entreats, “Mistress, let me take care of you!” (39). Interestingly, Elizabeth’s trust is cast in terms of Tituba’s physicality, specifically (and notably), her skin. She answers Tituba’s request by saying, “So many others have tried before you and have failed. But your hands are so soft. As soft as cut flowers” (39). Tituba’s reaction is of racialized hesitation: “Have you ever seen black flowers?” (39). It is this seeming contradiction in terms that Elizabeth believes Tituba to inhabit: “No, but if they existed they would be like your hands” (39). Thus Tituba’s physicality, like her national/familial history and labor, is just as indeterminate as it is important. It is a piece of her subjectivity that is describable only when using a paradox. In this way, studying migration helps us think about women who occupy multiple spheres of identity.

In startling fictive counterpart, Condé introduces the unlikely presence of Hester Prynne in Tituba’s New England prison cell. This moment of cross-textual communication, while seemingly a clever opportunity to play with historical and literary figures of the era in a bit of authorial indulgence, offers important considerations of the dynamic created between the two. Upon meeting Hester, Tituba again confronts issues of
race and status through a gendered camaraderie. Hester’s first observation that she notes aloud when she sees Tituba is “What a magnificent color she’s got for her skin” (95). Tituba replies as Hester cares for her wounds with an appeal to her supposed station, as she is expected to do with Elizabeth: “Mistress . . .” (95). Hester immediately chastises her for such a distinction and appeals instead to their gendered connection. When she learns that Tituba’s father named her, she launches into an essentialist feminist critique: “Her lip curled up in irritation . . . ‘You accepted the name a man gave you?’” (96). Condé is present again here in her play on this anachronistic brand of politicized feminist rhetoric. Hester aligns herself with Tituba not only as a woman but also as a societal pariah, denouncing her community and asking, “Aren’t I an outcast like yourself?” (96). Conversations on gender traverse conversations of sociopolitical place here, and they invite more space for other category expansions.

Just as quickly as Condé establishes allegiances between the two women, she presents another relationship to complicate meaning—that between physicality and goodness. Like Elizabeth Parris’s sentiment that Tituba may be successful in taking care of her by virtue of her soft skin, Hester holds Tituba’s face and exclaims, “You cannot have done evil, Tituba! I am sure of that, you’re too lovely!” (96). Tituba, again moved like she was at Elizabeth’s expression of her loveliness, is “bold enough to caress her face” and call her “lovely” too (96). Hester later serves as an impetus for Tituba to consider a more complex meaning of sexuality, one that does not restrict itself to receiving pleasure solely from men. When Hester lies down next to her one night, Tituba holds her and is surprised as “a feeling of pleasure slowly flooded over [her]” (122). She wonders, “Can you feel pleasure from hugging a body similar to your own? For me, pleasure had always been in the shape of another body whose hollows fitted my curves and whose swellings nestled in the tender flatlands of my flesh. Was Hester showing me another kind of bodily pleasure?” (122). Especially in her physical self-awareness, referencing “the tender flatlands of my flesh” feeling a “flood[ing]” pleasure, her description of this same-sex intimacy sounds much like her encounters with John Indian. However, the self-reflection comes in this case from thinking of how Hester’s body matched her own, how her “hollows fitted my curves.” The rest of her relationships depict, in albeit different ways, Tituba as a desiring subject but also a necessarily exoticized sexual object. Indeed, her body is the very condition of trade later in the text with a maroon leader in Barbados. Further, when she has a night-
mare about being raped, her husband and master have the same identification as sexual assailant. While her encounters with several partners throughout the text can be read as a privilege of her sexual liberation, they do not escape a problematic conflation of race and sexual prowess. In prison with Hester, in a moment of desire and pleasure between two women, Condé introduces a more intricate way to think about corporeal pleasure, a way that disrupts what is otherwise a stereotype of exoticized hyperactive sexuality in heteronormative contexts.

As a fictional literary text, *I, Tituba* offers similar questions of truth and difference by navigating the relationship between corporeality and identity. In “A Narrative of Violated Maternity,” Mara L. Dukats states that the novel “is much more than the life of an individual”: “Like any autobiographical account, it is indicative of ways in which identity is socially constructed; but it also illustrates ways in which the historically marginalized might articulate a vision of self . . . Tituba’s story is imbued with ambiguity” (747). Tituba’s so-called voice, then, is spoken out of contradictions and ambiguities that resist a clear understanding of truth.

This is quickly apparent when one looks at the ways in which Condé presents sexuality in the text. Like in Prince’s *History*, migrations serve to inform and interrogate the meanings and contexts of sexuality in Tituba’s narrative. Her story begins with her mother’s rape at the hands of a white man, thus introducing sexuality as an immediate and volatile component of her identity formation. However, as Manzor-Coats points out, such an introduction cannot be glossed over in broad feminist or racialized terms. She argues that the rape should be read neither as a “foundational act in women’s lives” nor as “a metaphor for the rape of Africa under colonialism” (739). For Manzor-Coats, the beginning of the narrative comes back to the issue of voice: “What we have in the first lines of *Moi, Tituba* is Tituba’s voice speaking to us, telling us about her mother’s rape. This telling aspect forces us to see this act of rape as a question of language and subjectivity” (739).

This reading of voice, unlike those that would relegate the notion to a limited definition of authenticity or tout it as a representative of all Caribbean women, is productive in what it offers as the disruptive possibilities of voice. Manzor-Coats suggests, “When rape is seen in this fashion, there is the liberating possibility that women will not play their role right, will actually refuse to play the role of subjects of fear and thus thwart the rape attempt” (740). By “not playing their role right,” women reject “the grammar of violence” that would tether gender and sexuality to violence (740). Condé thus presents Tituba outside an identifiable or categorical
set of gender roles. Perpetual travels provide a fitting context for such a presentation, as Tituba never remains in a fixed subject position that would allow her, again remembering Mary Prince, to “understand rightly her condition.”

Tituba’s quest to understand and fully experience her own sexuality is maintained throughout the novel in her tempestuous relationships with men. John Indian sparks her initial interest in her own body when he tells her “You could be lovely if you wanted to” (13). When she considers his words, Tituba begins questioning the condition of her physicality: “Up until now I had never thought about my body. Was I beautiful? Was I ugly? I had no idea. What had he said? ‘You know, you could be lovely’” (15). On a corporeal level, Tituba again expresses the same sentiment as Mary Prince—that she did not “understand rightly [her] condition.” The question of her physical ontology—“Was I beautiful? Was I ugly?”—results in a brief but telling masturbation scene:

I took off my clothes, lay down, and let my hand stray over my body. It seemed to me that these curves and protuberances were harmonious. As I neared my pudenda, it seemed it was no longer me but John Indian who was caressing me. Out of the depths of my body gushed a pungent tidal wave that flooded my thighs. (15)

This moment offers a couple of interesting considerations. First, Tituba at once considers her body to be “harmonious,” and her specific physical contours are immediately celebrated.

Second, however, the imagined presence of John Indian is a significant abdication of personalized physical pleasure. In other words, he plays the role of a sort of benefactor of her sexual excitement that does not exist in its own right apart from his bestowing it. It is ultimately, in the sequence of the text, John Indian who causes her to climax. She is, thus, able to explore her own body in new and valuable ways at the same time that she becomes further tied to John Indian. She is at once belonging to herself and not her own. It becomes, after all, no longer herself but John Indian who caresses her body. Manzor-Coats rightly shows ambivalence working, too, in the conflict between freedom and sexual desire: “Tituba is fully aware of the contradictions her choices entail. That is, she knows that her desire to be a free woman and her desire to be in control of her sexuality are incompatible” (742). Tituba, thus, chooses to leave her freedom and become a slave again in order to be with him. This paradox travels with Tituba throughout the text, later manifesting itself in her telling
Benjamin Cohen she “does not want [his] freedom” when he tells her she can go home (134). Later, she states it another way, this time with another bit of irony but in terms that she knows would anger Hester: “some men who have the virtue of being weak instill in us the desire to be a slave!” (140).

The nod that Tituba makes above to how Hester might react to her missing her master and lover points to the general role that women play as sources of advice and critique in the text. The women in Tituba’s life chastise her for being ruled by her desires, which they find especially dangerous in relation to men. For Hester Prynne, Tituba’s romantic impulses threaten her politics. She tells her, “You’re too fond of love, Tituba! I’ll never make a feminist out of you!” (101). “Feminism” here is obviously a narrowly defined term with its own essentialist rejection of emotionalism—what it would identify as women’s internalized oppression. Abena similarly links female empowerment to the erasure of men. Thus she appears, unsolicited, to offer a joint concern of sexuality and migration: “Why can’t women do without men? . . . Now you’re going to be dragged off to the other side of the water” (15). Tituba stops her there: “To the other side of the water?” but Abena merely replies, “in a distressed voice”: “Why can’t women do without men?” (16). The voices of Hester and Abena resonate with Tituba when she later asks, in the servitude of Benjamin Cohen d’Azevedo, “Why must any relationship with the slightest hint of affection between a man and a woman necessarily end up in bed?” (126). As she finds herself in the position of “being both mistress and servant,” though, she is still able to complicate even this “odd situation” with feelings of sexual pleasure (127). While she cannot help but compare Benjamin’s “crooked, pasty body” with John Indian’s “dark-brown muscles,” she is still able to “pitch[h] and heav[e] just as well on the sea of delight with [her] misshapen lover” (127). Condé actively pursues here the tension between corporeal pleasure and hierarchical gender dynamics. Tituba is aware of the problematics of serving both as slave and mistress, yet she nonetheless celebrates the physical pleasure the relationship affords.

Tituba again inhabits a similar contradiction back in Barbados, where she becomes the lover of Christopher, the maroon leader. She understands that he is manipulating her, trading sex for the invincibility he believes her magic will provide him. However, she explains her willing flirtations in ironically antifeminist terms: “I had not lost that deep instinct that makes me a woman” (145). Condé mitigates the incongruities of Tituba’s sexual desires and roles with Christopher’s myopia. When
Tituba attempts to break out of what is, in Christopher’s view, a singular sexual utility and to be productive on a political level, she suggests that she be allowed to join the maroon’s struggle and fight alongside him. He laughs at her and responds, “Fight? You’re going too fast. A woman’s duty, Tituba, is not to fight or make war, but to make love!” (151). This attempt to tether women to a particular notion of sexuality and feminine duty is what Tituba must struggle to challenge and rearticulate for herself, often by occupying several gendered roles at once.

This is the case when Tituba is again confronted with her own contradictions as she embarks on a relationship with Iphigene. After Tituba makes her home again in Barbados and joins the maroons, Iphigene is brought to her by other slaves after being whipped and left for dead. As she continues to care for him, she believes herself to be performing the symbolic role of a maternal figure. She tells him, “I was once pregnant and I had to do away with the baby. It seems to me you have come back in its place” (166). Thus, when Iphigene presents himself as a sexual partner, the functions of mother and lover become conflated, so much so that Tituba is initially horrified: “I was ashamed of offering up my old age to his caresses and I almost pushed him away for I had the absurd feeling of committing incest” (169). As with her initial hesitation with Benjamin, however, she stifles her protest as “his desire became contagious” (169). Much of her interest and focus, however, remains allied with the maternal role that she still hopes to fill even as she complicates it.

Condé offers motherhood as a particularly difficult prospect for Tituba throughout the text in terms of the relationship between sexuality and gender. When she realizes she is pregnant in Boston, Tituba notes, “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” (50). Her sentiment is reminiscent of the anxiety surrounding maternity in Harriett Jacobs’s narrative. In her essay “A Narrative of Violated Maternity: Moi, Tituba, sorcière... Noire de Salem,” Mara L. Dukats examines the ways in which slavery violently manipulated maternity to its own pragmatic ends of property. She uses Morrison’s Beloved as an example of attempted reclamation of “the intersubjective bonds between mother and child,” suggesting that “the only way that Sethe can preserve all this is to become the agent of the death of her child” (746). She goes on to argue, “Infanticide thus becomes a sacrificial act, the expression of Sethe’s maternal responsibility” (746). This is not the experience for Tituba, however. The ambivalence of both her feelings on maternity and her feminist strands is again
present as she states, “I had trouble getting over the murder of my child” (Condé 52). In an act of attempted maternal redemption, Tituba gives the very ill Betsey a “magic bath,” “plung[ing] her up to her neck in a liquid to which [Tituba] had given all the properties of amniotic fluid” (63). Replicating a birth moment, she recuperates a lost sense of positive maternity: “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” (63). Significantly, this mock birthing scene is what instigates the questions/craze over Tituba’s witchcraft, escorting her into social critique and condemnation. Maternity, again, turns dangerous in the context of slavery.

There is a second incident in which Tituba attempts to recreate the life that she takes. Living with the maroons, Tituba saves a baby who “was hardly out of her mother’s womb” (152). As the moments of birth and death begin to converge, Tituba “h[olds] the little thing back” from “stepp[ing] through death’s door” (152). When she returns the infant to the mother, she thinks about the experience of maternity and wonders about her own would-be child as she invokes the decisive Hester Prynne: “How mysterious motherhood is! For the first time I asked myself whether my child, whose life I had taken, would not after all have given my existence a meaning and a purpose. Hester, did we make a mistake and shouldn’t you have lived for your child instead of dying with her?” (152). Here, the feminist rhetoric she hears from Hester gets flipped as she wonders whether her child would have “given [her] existence a meaning and a purpose.” Meaning and purpose are externalized, and she does not look solely to herself to find them in this case. Tituba again finds herself caught in the middle of dueling strands of the same experience. Maternity, then, is forced into flux alongside matters of race, labor, nation, and sexuality. When Tituba considers her own maternity during her second pregnancy, motherhood is again a concept with multiple meanings. She wonders about the consequences of raising a child who will be marginalized on the levels of gender, labor, and societal mores: “My child made me combative. I was sure it was a girl! What sort of life was in store for her? That of my brothers and sisters, the slaves, ruined by their conditions and their labor? Or a life like mine, which forced me to live in hiding as an outcast and a recluse on the edge of a secluded valley?” (158). Having experienced society’s restrictions as a slave, a witch, and a woman, she sees no good options for her daughter.

Alongside such obvious and numerous problems associated with maternity as a product of the slave economy generally and of Tituba’s
particular experience, Condé positions the very trope of mother as a dubious one. Thus “mother” itself is a term for which Condé acknowledges multiple meanings. It is equal parts sanctity and setback. To this paradox, Condé adds the realm of what the term means socially. The day Tituba returns to Barbados, she is approached by a group of young female maroons, one of whom says, “Honor us, mother, with your presence” (142). Tituba recoils at this, explaining, “Mother? The word made me jump and boil with rage, since it was a term of respect reserved for old women” (142). Troubled by the thought of her being perceived as an old woman, Tituba is again ambivalent when she later discovers she is pregnant with Christopher’s child. This causes her to ponder the apparent capriciousness of pregnancy: “Christopher’s brutal embraces had conceived what the love of my Jew had not been able to do. You’ve got to face up to it. A child in fact is not the fruit of love but of chance” (158). Thus a child is potentially and paradoxically one’s arbitrary purpose. Despite this, in the epilogue, Tituba is able to “choose a descendent” after dying without giving birth (176). It is through this child, Samantha, that Tituba inhabits and perpetuates a legacy of her own. She is thus able to be generative after death.

The idea of “a woman’s work” that attends reactions on all sides to the prospect of motherhood is one that Tituba must also confront when considering and answering to charges of being a witch. Condé presents “witch” as a slippery trope, one that productively troubles singular understandings of labor that would see it as a category unto itself. Throughout the text Tituba, especially as a figure of Salem Village who does not fit within the bounds of New England sensibilities, is consistently presented and frustrated with others’ pejorative notions of witchcraft. Often, her witchery is vaguely tied by her persecutors to her imagined history, a relationship that confronts her with a simultaneous problem of what she is and where she came from. One day after Tituba dutifully recites the Apostles’ Creed, her new mistress Susanna Endicott asks her, “Weren’t you brought up by a certain Nago witch called Mama Yaya?” (26). Tituba hesitates, with a troubled, “Witch . . . Witch? She took care of people and cured them” (26). She thus explains Mama Yaya’s “witchery” by attempting to clarify what it was Mama Yaya did. Later, when Tituba tells John Indian about the exchange, he casts the problem in racialized terms: “Governor Dutton had two slaves who had been accused of dealing with Satan burned in the square at Bridgetown. For the whites, that’s what being a witch means . . . !” (27). Tituba’s response is telling: “Dealing with Satan! . . . Before setting foot inside this house I didn’t know
who Satan was!’ (27). Essentialist definitions become key here. Without ever having heard of good and evil in Westernized Christian terms, she has no vocabulary or system of meaning for what actions would be considered righteous or evil through that lens. As a racial and cultural outsider, she has no “real” or “pure” conception of “good-ness,” as it is conceived by Anglo-Christian society, for example. This conversation with John Indian sets in motion Tituba’s search throughout the text for a broader understanding of what it is to be a witch.

John Indian is the first to call her a witch, in this case as an ironic flirtation, after she scratches his finger while stealing his handkerchief: “Ow! What are you doing, little witch?” (17). She takes note of the negative connotation of the term, as she does from Susanna Endicott and characters throughout the text. This leads her to a series of questions that create a discrepancy between how she and her society alternately perceive witchcraft and, thus, to two readings of the term:

What is a witch? I noticed that when he said the word, it was marked with disapproval. Why should that be? Why? 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 (if that’s what the person who has this gift is to be called) be cherished and revered rather than feared? (17)

Immediately after her musing on the terminology, she remembers her mother’s question about the problems of desire: “Why can’t women do without men?” reiterating with her own “Yes why?” (17). She considers this as the environment around her echoes her desperation: “Outside, the black cord of night was strangling the island. Not a breath of air. The trees were motionless, like stakes” (17). At once, the island’s naturalistic torment of being strangled is her own early sentiment of suffocation at the hands of men. Thus her gendered position is commingled with her nationalistic one.

Once living with the Parrises in America, Tituba is again confronted with the idea of witchcraft as a distinctly “evil” practice. Encircled by Abigail and her friends, Tituba is taunted by the little girls. Mary Walcott asks her, “Tituba, is it true you know everything, you see everything and can do everything? You’re a witch then?” (61). Tituba responds with “Don’t use words whose meaning you don’t know. Do you know what a witch really is?” (61). “Of course we do,’ intervened Anne Putnam.
'It’s someone who has made a pact with the devil. Mary’s right. Are you a witch, Tituba? I think you must be’” (62). The idea of “what a witch really is” here interests me. Even as Tituba makes an appeal to an essential witch-ness, she attempts to trouble the children’s definition, one fraught with racial and cultural otherness. Here again Condé inserts a tether to the rhetoric of essence to confront the very notions of singularity.

For Tituba, one’s witchery is inseparable from one’s work. In her musings about the meaning of witchcraft, she casts it in terms of the work done as a witch. In so doing, she aligns it with the kind of acts that Cheryl Fish identifies as “benevolent labor.” Fish’s *Black and White Women’s Travel Narratives* in part examines the work done by women who travel with missions of humanitarian good will. Fish uses the term “benevolent labor” to “include work related to helping the poor, the fallen, the oppressed, and the injured and linked to mobile subjectivity away from the traveler’s home” (137 n. 2). This is in relation to the studies done on what Lori D. Ginzberg calls “benevolent femininity.” Tituba, as well as the Puritan community surrounding her, significantly feminizes the work of witchcraft, the latter identifying it in terms of and in distinction from Anglo-European conventions of “benevolent” women’s work. Tituba thus reinterprets “benevolent femininity” subversively in order to take it out of this narrow space. Further, Tituba uses her voice vis-à-vis her witchcraft and takes revenge as she speaks in the trials: “Whose names did they want me to give? Because I wasn’t just going to give the names of the poor wretches who were being dragged along with me in the mud. I was going to strike hard. And at the top” (93). Her status as a witch here affords her to strike back at the very powers who would condemn her for it. Thus Condé presents witchcraft as a slippery category in terms of both labor and gender, rejecting the fixity that those around Tituba try to assign to her on either front.

Back in Barbados after her miserable experience in Salem, Tituba is troubled to find that even the people from her homeland look for logical explanations of her powers. Christopher, the leader of the maroons whom Tituba encounters, demands of her, “Are you a witch? . . . Yes or no!” She sighs with frustration at the call for fixed answers to be attached to such a vague trope like “witch” and responds in kind: “Everyone gives that word a different meaning. Everyone believes he can fashion a witch to his way of thinking so that she will satisfy his ambitions, dreams, and desires” (146). Here, her frustration with a clear categorization of the term is evident. Ignored, Tituba’s words are immediately followed by Christopher’s deal: “Listen . . . I’m not going to stay here listening to you philosophize!
I’m offering you a deal. You make me invincible and in exchange . . .
I’ll give you everything a woman desires” (146). Christopher’s “deal,”
freighted with highly sexualized inferences, does two things at once. First,
even back in Barbados, it reinforces the stereotype of black female sexuality
as hyperactive, as if the terms of transaction would obviously and immediately appeal to Tituba’s womanhood (since his phallocentric logic
extends to a broader category of what a “woman” desires). At the same
time, however, Tituba’s reaction is one of desperation and longing.

She immediately appeals to Mama Yaya and Abena, “Can’t I try to help him?” attempting to justify her supplication with “He’s fighting for a noble cause” (146). After their deaths, Mama Yaya and Abena maintain strong presences, often of advice and even chastisement, throughout the novel. Like the ancestral manifestations of the Day family, especially Sapphira Wade, in Mama Day, Tituba’s mother Abena continues to speak to her daughter and offer analysis and judgment. In this instance, Abena laughs with a caustic reply: “Hypocrite! Is it the cause he’s fighting for that interests you? Come now!” (146). Because of Tituba’s reaction, we can interpret Christopher’s deal as another example that reveals Tituba’s strong tether to her own sexuality. In this sense, it serves as an opportunity for her to maintain an expression of desire. Of course, whether Tituba achieves any sort of sexual independence or not is an entirely different matter. Christopher alone spells out the conditions of the trade and, in so doing, renders Tituba simultaneously desirous lover and chattel in a very particular kind of labor arrangement.

Tituba’s putative relationship to her powers also manifests itself in her concern over the retention of her personal history. After giving her deposition in the Salem court, as she is taken to the prison at Ipswich, she panics at the thought of how she will be remembered, if at all:

I was racked by a violent feeling of pain and terror. It seemed that I was gradually being forgotten. I felt that I would only be mentioned in passing in these Salem witchcraft trials that would arouse the curiosity and pity of generations to come as the greatest testimony of a superstitious and barbaric age. There would be mention here and there of a “slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing ‘hoodoo’” . . . Tituba would be condemned forever! There would never, ever, be a careful, sensitive biography recreating my life and its suffering. (110)

The idea of how society will continue to define witchcraft and consequently define her by her dubious connection to it is a worry that accompanies Tituba throughout the text.
Navigating fluid spheres of gender and work, Condé uses Tituba’s journeys to challenge ultimately any consistent reading of a would-be univocal, overarching voice that proves her authenticity. After returning to her homeland, Tituba notes, “Ah yes, life had pushed me around! From Salem to Ipswich. From Barbados to America and back. But now I could sit down and rest and say: ‘You won’t manhandle me anymore!’” (145). Her migrations from place to place are what, she implies, allow such strong resolve. These same migrations are what erase any resolve, however, from social conventions that would put too fine a point on Tituba’s own experience. Early on, Condé complicates ideas like “enslavement” and “freedom,” throwing each into flux as Tituba chooses to place herself back within the bonds of slavery in order to marry John Indian. Early on, she appears to understand the problem that arises upon her deciding to take on the life of slavery, and she is harshly critical of the system that she is about to enter. When John Indian makes his ultimatum to Tituba about her living with him in his home if they are to be together at all, she asks ironically, “Your home? . . . Since when does a slave have a ‘home’? Don’t you belong to Susanna Endicott?” (18). He tries to explain, “Yes, I belong to Susanna Endicott, but she’s a good mistress . . . ,” but she interrupts: “How can a mistress be ‘good’? Can a slave cherish his master?” (18). While Mary Prince concludes her narrative condemning the corrupting influence of the institution of slavery, Tituba directs her antagonism squarely at the slaveholder with her own question of moral character. Tituba complicates and contradicts her argument as she decides to marry John Indian despite the implications for her free status. And again with Benjamin, as stated earlier, Tituba romanticizes him and their relationship such that, when she thinks of him after they part, she reminds his memory that “I begged you to leave me my chains” (140).

Upon Benjamin’s emancipating her after her period of enslavement, Tituba discovers as soon as she boards the ship to sail back home to Barbados that “emancipation,” “manumission,” and “freedom” are themselves complicated words that do not at all have the same meaning. Boarding Bless the Lord for her passage, she is confronted by a sailor with the irony of her condemnation. When he warns the captain, “Be careful, she’s one of the witches of Salem!” and she responds that the governor issued a general pardon, the sailor tells her, “But you confessed your crime so there’s no pardon for you” (135). Trapped in the impossible ambivalence of her status as a witch, Tituba once again finds herself manipulated into a service role. The captain stipulates that he will take her to Barbados in exchange for her maintaining good weather and the health of his crew. When Tituba tries to explain the limits of her powers, he spits and says,
“Negress, when you speak to me, say ‘Master’ and lower your eyes; otherwise I’ll smash those stumps out of your mouth” (135). Even as she exits the system of slavery, phantom shackles still impede her journey.

Toward the end of the novel, Tituba’s understanding of freedom is again questioned by Mama Yaya, a consistent voice of wisdom and advice. When she hears from Iphigene that he and others are going to burn the houses of landholding whites, Tituba mutters half to him, half to herself, “Do we have to become like them?” (162). Once he leaves, she calls upon Mama Yaya to remind her of what she had once told Tituba: “Don’t pervert your heart! Don’t become like them!” and to ask Mama Yaya “Is this the price to pay for freedom?” (162). In reply, Mama Yaya again turns Tituba’s attention to the meaning and importance of words. She says to her, “You talk about freedom. Have you any idea what it means?” (162). Leaving the question as a rhetorical one, Mama Yaya disappears.

Despite her dubious understandings of what it is to be a free agent, Tituba affirmatively answers the question of whether she has a “song” in the epilogue. She is able to hear the song all over the island, and it lives on through her “daughter,” Samantha. Importantly, however, this song is experienced and created in the section of the novel that takes place after any and all historical records. The story of Tituba after her death is what she calls her “real story” (175). However, this nominal authenticity is created solely by Condé. She thus retains total control over Tituba’s “voice” as it ostensibly lives on. On a broader level, the entirety of the text, while superficially a reinforcement of stereotypes like the exoticized black woman and essentialist forms of feminism, Condé effectively challenges these images by presenting these forces and tropes as inherently unstable. Such is the larger destabilizing potential of her diasporic text.

As the narratives in this book have shown, looking back (as long as we do not nostalgically imagine history as a stable or *sui generis* space) can indeed be a productive enterprise, as it often aids in the practice of looking ahead. As Laura Alexandra Harris suggests, “Only in looking back can I interpret my race and class as inextricable from my sexuality and feminist consciousness, and only in looking forward can I predict what a schizophrenic narrative it constructs” (13). The productive implications of Mary Prince’s *History* for women’s fiction need not remain in a fixed position themselves.