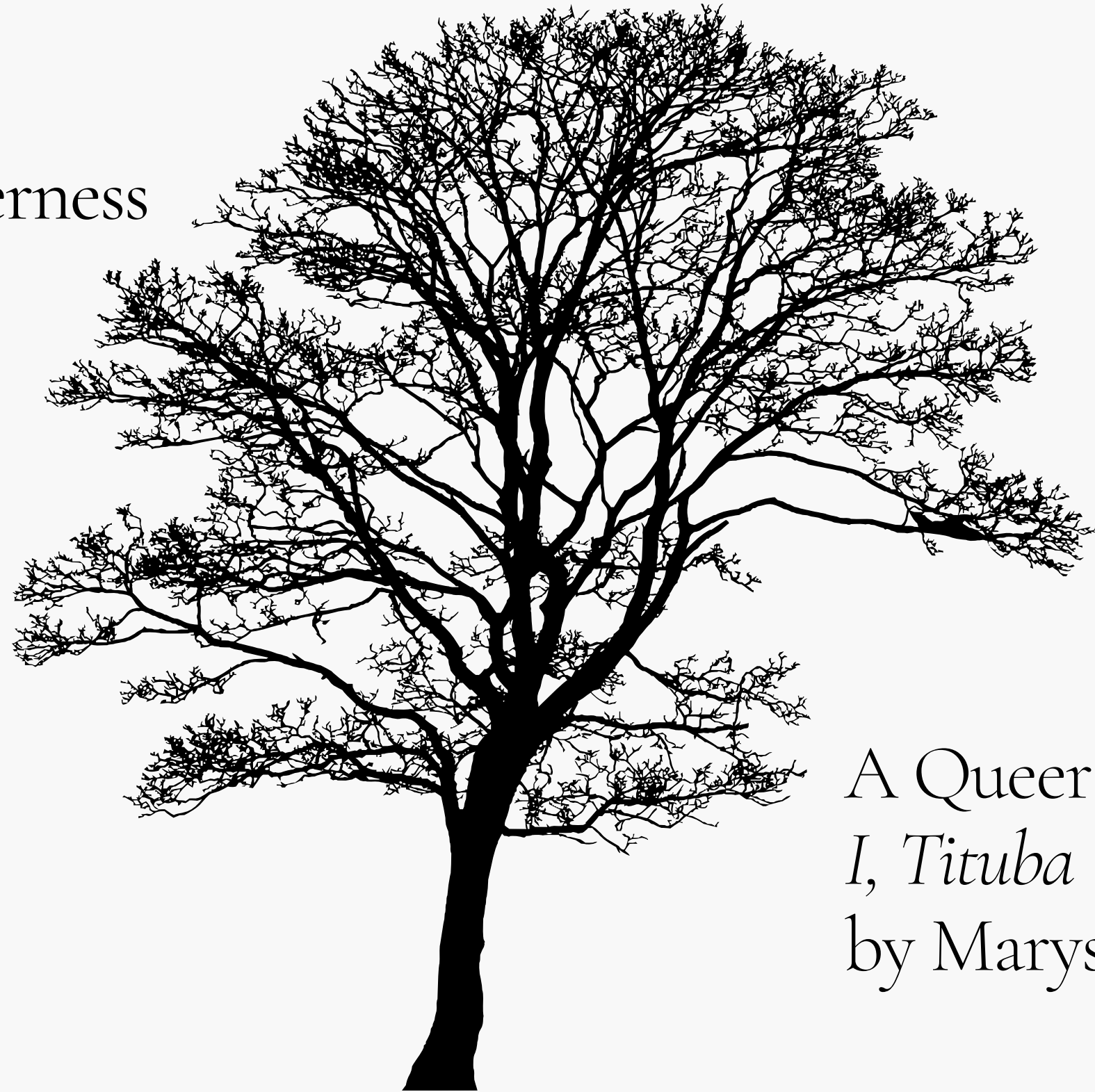


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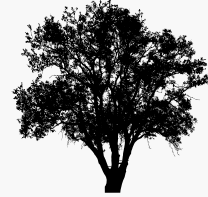
Finding Solidarity in Queerness



A Queer Reading of
I, Tituba
by Maryse Condé

Term Project Proposal Presentation by Nhi Uyen Huynh | French 140D

Thesis Title:



Finding Solidarity in
Queerness: A Queer
Reading of *I, Tituba* by
Maryse Condé

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Introduction

In Richard Philcox's translation of Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, the protagonist Tituba is frequently defined by her relationships with men throughout the novel, whether it be with her enslaver or her multiple male lovers. In this paper, I argue instead for a queer reading of the character of Tituba through close reading of her interactions with women, such as Elizabeth Parris and Hester. This queer reading I argue then leads me to label Tituba anachronistically as "bisexual", having both intense romantic relations with both men and women.

This 'bisexuality', I argue that bisexuality/lesbianism gives Tituba, an otherwise extremely marginalized and oppressed character, a sense of solidarity and agency. Through my term paper, I want to focus on doing close readings and detailed analyses on Tituba's interactions with mainly women to prove my argument but will also interweave explorations and comparisons with some of her romantic interactions with men. It's also important for me to distinguish between these romantic interactions from her strong paternal relationships, such as Mama Yaya and Abena, so as to not get these also very strong relationships mixed up.



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Outline Of Paper



- Introduction (contextualization of I, Tituba, etc)
- Section 1: Close readings of interactions between Tituba and Elizabeth Parris, Tituba and Hester
- Section 2: Explore and compare with close readings of Tituba with other men (John Indian, Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo, Iphigene)
- Conclusion alongside these close readings and analyses

Section 1 Passages



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Passage #1

“How lovely you are, Tituba,’ she murmured.

‘Lovely?’ I said it unbelievably, for the mirror that Susanna Endicott and Samuel Parris had held up for me had convinced me of the opposite. Something gave inside me and impulsively I proposed: ‘Mistress, let me take care of you!’

She smiled and took my hands. ‘So many others have tried before you and have failed. But your hands are so soft. As soft as cut flowers.’

‘Have you ever seen black flowers?’ I scoffed.

She thought for a moment and then answered: ‘No, but if they existed they would be like your hands.’”

(Condé 38-39).

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Analysis



- Positive reaction towards Tituba even as her slave-owner, flirtatious tone in first meeting
- “something g[i]ve inside [of Tituba] → queer affection for Elizabeth in wanting to take care of her
- “black flowers” Tituba has faced and internalized so much racist remarks; is a shock to her
- recognition of Tituba as an actual person in her entirety, *with* the race tone she is



Passage #2

“That night Hester lay down beside me, as she did sometimes. I laid my head on the quiet water lily of her cheek and held her tight. Surprisingly, a feeling of pleasure slowly flooded over me. 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?” (Condé 125).

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Analysis



- “feeling of pleasure slowly flood[ing] over her” – implication of sexual pleasure
- “flood” used previously in the book when she had an orgasm while having sexual intercourse with John Indian → used again for Tituba & Hester
- Tituba leaves the reader and herself with this questioning
- By having sexual intimacy with Hester → brings her comfort, solidarity in her pain, foreshadowing of her being released soon (three astericks/dinkus)

Passage #3

“I have only one regret, for we invisibles too have our regrets so that we can better relish our share of happiness: it’s having to be separated from Hester. We do communicate, of course. I can smell the dried almonds on her breath. I can hear the echo of her laugh. But each of us remains on her side of the ocean. I know that she is pursuing her dreams of creating a world of women that will be more just and humane. I myself have loved men too much and shall continue to do so. Sometimes I get the urge to slip into someone’s bed to satisfy a bit of leftover desire and my fleeting lover is delighted with his solitary pleasure” (Condé 178).

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Analysis

- “only one regret” and repetitive language of still feeling her physical presence, even if she is not physically present with Hester across the sea
- longing for reunion with Hester feels reminiscent of a long-lost lover
- “loved men too much and shall continue to do so” in comparison to Hester
“creating a world of women that will be more just and humane” → although Tituba has strong feelings and yearnings for Hester, she also loves men too much more for her to move to Hester’s side of the ocean





Section 2 Passages



Passage #4

“Blessed is the love that carries man on the waters of oblivion. That makes him forget he is a slave. That rolls back the torment and the fear. Reassured, Iphigene and I plunged back into the healing waters of sleep. We swam against the current, watching the needlefish court the crayfish. We dried our hair under the moon. We did not sleep for long, however. I must confess that once the intoxication had worn off, I felt a little ashamed. This boy could have been my son! Did I no longer have any respect for myself? And then why had so many men passed through my bed? Hester was right when she said: “You’re too fond of love, Tituba! And I wondered whether this was not a blemish in me, a fault that I should have tried to cure myself of (Condé 178).

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Analysis



- Tituba sleeps with Iphigine, who is like a son to her
- Hester mention → thinking of her even while having sex with him
- “fond of love” usage of love rather than gendered term (fond of [men]/[women])
- “not a blemish” → allowing herself to be in her sexuality completely

Passage #5

“My sweet, crooked, misshapen lover! Before losing you forever I can remember our meager moments of happiness together. When you joined me in my big bed in the attic, we used to pitch and plunge like a drunken boat on a choppy sea. We rowed together under your guidance and finally reached the shore. Sleep washed us softly up on the beach and in the morning we could start our daily chores refreshed. My sweet, crooked, misshapen lover! We did not make love the last night we spent together, as if our souls were taking over from our bodies. Once again, you blamed yourself for your hardness. And once again I begged you to leave me my chains. Hester, Hester, you would be angry with me. But some men who have the virtue of being weak instill in us the desire to be a slave!” (Condé 141).



Analysis

- mention of Hester → complicates and adds nuance to her love for Benjamin (“Hester, Hester you would be angry with me”)
- sea metaphor → sexual implications
- “once again” repetition calls for uneasy cycle between the two for her freedom and his difficulty in letting her go
 - unease doesn’t exist in her relationship with Hester



Conclusion (provisional)



- Queerness as a complicated method to help Tituba realize her disempowerment in the patriarchal system
- Queerness as a method to free Tituba and allow her to continue to be fond and free to love as she pleases, even in the afterlife



- How I can expand on other passages, specifically passages about men?
- Any other passages to consider/analyses that might be slightly off?
- Any general feedback 😊 is most appreciated

Questions ?



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Thank you
very much!

