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Mariposas, brujas, conjuros, doncellas y caballeros andantes



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The book focusses on those accused of being related to witchcraft and being witches. The figure of the witch was created by the society these women lived in as it searched for explanations to the facts that could not be understood and could not be given an answer to. They also represent our secret, hidden side, the part of us that cannot be shown in public.

The witches that form the centre of the book are studied from many perspectives and analysed using different documents. The fear society has of witches has been cinematically portrayed over the years, with films from directors like Ingmar Bergman and Mario Monicelli. Witches have also been seen on our walls, represented by artists like Francisco de Goya. “Comunidors”, sacred constructions that kept away and scared off any kind of witchcraft, have a place in the author’s analysis. She also looks at biology, where the dread of witches led to some species of both animals and plants being thought to be the manifestation of a metamorphosed witch.

The book itself is divided into two parts. The first one, *Mariposas, brujas y conjuros*, discusses the different types of documents related to witchcraft. It also provides a psychological analysis of the fear society has had on the figure of the witch. Witch-hunting is another important point in this part.

The second part, “Doncellas y caballeros andantes”, is divided into three further fragments. These discuss Ingmar Bergman’s *The seventh seal*, *The spring of the maiden* and Mario Monicelli’s *L’armata Brancaleone*.

As already mentioned, fear is one of the important themes addressed in the book. Witches were feared mostly by people with little formal education, who could not give an explanation to the phenomena around them. This was not a silent fear. Folklorists and even fans collected stories about witchcraft. Archives are where the saddest stories were found. Popular culture, such as passing down stories through families, had one of the most important roles in showing us how to recognise witches. Captivating our imagination, the fear grew. Consequently, the burden, often life-threatening, of being considered a witch also grew. Court rooms became involved in witch hunts and the population’s motivation to hunt down “witches” also increased. Once caught, they were asked what the devil had told them, an impossible question, given that the devil only existed in the fearful mind of the questioner. How could they answer? As Jiménez Sureda states, only a miracle could save them. Other institutions began hunting witches, such as the Catholic Church, whose goal was to eradicate everything that deviated from the commandments. The faith of the populace legitimised the hunt. In the end, the Inquisition dealt out punishment to those condemned as witches. During the seventeenth century, witch hunting became professional. Not only did the Church have an important role in the witch hunt, but the secular community also participated. The courts conducted under the auspices of the Lords were decisive in Medieval and Modern Catalan society. They did not go after heresies, but crimes.

The devil was everywhere. Everyone had to be alert, always – which justified the Church having a wide range of mental, oral, factual, and physical tools to protect its flock. So, the Church was a clear refuge from witchcraft. The “comunidors” were accessible to Christians as a safe heaven. During a century and half, Catalonia judged more than two hundred people, accused of witchcraft. Of these, ninety percent were women.

We can name Astruga sa Gainarda and Montserratada Brull as two Catalan women accused of crimes associated with witchcraft, which led to the death of one and the excommunication of the other. Astruga was found guilty of intervening in couple's relationships, while Montserratada, a midwife, was judged responsible for the death of an apparently healthy child.

The second part of the book begins with an analysis of the consequences the black plague had in Europe. To do so, Jiménez Sureda uses Ingmar Bergman's film *The seventh seal*: the main characters, Antonius and Jöns, return from the Crusades to find that Europe has been devastated by the plague. A symbolic image that appears during the film is when the knight challenges death to a chess match, thinking he can win. It is observed that the European population's ignorance and fear is transformed into violence. Death beats everyone, portraying the defeat of Antonius' chess game. These dances with death that Europeans used to carry out result from the fear of death's arrival. Today we see the diluted remains in All Saints celebrations.

Another of Bergman's films analysed is *The spring of the maiden*. According to legend, the daughters and wife of Pehr Tyrsson were heading to Church when they were raped and killed by three homeless men. The robes they obtained from the three daughters were sold, surprisingly to the mother of the three girls. The ending, like any Grimms' tale, was dark, as the parents discover that the assassins were in fact the brothers of the girls. Tales like this one spread across the northern countries of Europe. *The spring of the maiden* helps in the analysis of the banality of evil, where even the most powerful of parents cannot protect their children from the evil that roams the land in every-day guises. In this world, Good is beaten by Evil. Ingmar Bergman's films uses archetypes to demonstrate the impossibility of winning against death.

Jiménez Sureda describes Monicelli's film *L'armata Brancaleone* - a comedy set in Mediaeval Europe which has parallels with Don Quijote. The storyline follows the aftermath of an attack on a manner in which the Lord is eventually killed by its own inhabitants. While selling his possessions, they find a noble title. The film follows the band as they find the useless Brancaleone de Nursia, the only possible heir to the title, and their subsequent adventures. Even though it is a comedy, the themes are based on a darker reality which other filmmakers, such as Agenore Incrocci and Furio Scarpelli have drawn upon in their work.

Through *Mariposas, brujas, conjuros, doncellas y caballeros andantes*, the reader can make sense of how the society in this era dealt with its fears and which what it did not understand. It allows the reader to understand the significance of witches and witchcraft in this age and the function they had.

Jiménez Sureda uses examples from villages in Middle and Modern age societies; not only Catalan and European, but also worldwide to illustrate her points.

The analysis of the context of witchcraft is done through taking specific case studies. A study is made on how the Church and the state influenced the psychology, perceptions and understanding of the population at large, so that the view of those villagers that feared witches is considered in the context of those that hunted them. Importantly, a voice is given to those, mainly women, who had to fight to survive because of being accused of witches.

In parallel, Jiménez Sureda also includes a study of how contemporary culture, specifically film,

has used the Medieval era as a source for cinematic storytelling. Films by directors Bergman and Monicelli portray the age through our contemporary eyes to tell universal stories.