

# Appendix, Episode 3: Witch Hunts

## SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Niki Fitzgerald, Hannah McGregor, Hannah Rehak

*(Witch, Please Theme Music plays) (Dance of the Priestesses by Victor Herbert Orchestra)*

**Hannah McGregor** 00:10

Hello and welcome to Witch, Please, a fortnightly podcast about the Harry Potter world. I'm Hannah McGregor.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:17

And I'm Marcelle Kosman. And Hannah. Since we're talking about witch hunts today, I would like to start off by chatting a little bit about our favorite non Harry Potter fictional witches in the Sorting Hat.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:32

I love this idea, Marcelle. I love it so much. It's almost like I came up with it myself.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:37

Yes, yes. Someone smart came up with it.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:40

Well, everybody here is very smart. So it could have been any of us. But really, I just want to talk about Baba Yaga, for the most part. Can I tell you how much I love Baba Yaga? Iconic home design.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:51

Tell me who Baba Yaga is because I feel like I hear a lot about Baba Yaga. And I don't, we haven't met, so...

**Hannah McGregor** 01:00

You don't know her. *[Laughs]*

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:01

I don't know her.

**Hannah McGregor** 01:03

She's an Eastern European witch myth, like the witch who lives in the woods, but sort of a couple of really exciting and distinct things about her are that her home has chicken legs.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:16

What?

**Hannah McGregor** 01:17

Yeah, she's got this really cool cabin that's on these like long chicken legs. So her cabin can move around. I'm doing a chicken leg thing with my hand right now.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:29

Are you? *[Laughs]*

**Hannah McGregor** 01:30

Yes. Yes, I am. An anatomically correct chicken leg reproduced with my hand. Look at it go.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:41

Is that one of the reasons why your renovations are taking so long? Because you have installed chicken legs?

**Hannah McGregor** 01:46

Oh, yeah, sorry. We did move the entirety of my condo out into open air and then installed chicken legs under it.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:54

Incredible.

**Hannah McGregor** 01:55

And we had to sort of install a system where, like, in order to enter you have to answer a riddle and donate some of your blood. Like it's not, it's no big deal. But that did take a while to get the permits.

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:04

Yeah, yeah. I imagine.

**Hannah McGregor** 02:06

I also just would really like to take a moment to give a shout out to Sycorax, who is Caliban's mother in *The Tempest*, who has the best witch name of all time. And I always

said that if I ever had a daughter I would name her Sycorak, but alas, I am daughterless. What are your favorite witches?

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:27

So you made an incredible list ahead of time and you have a few of my favorites on there already including Ursula and Mommy Fortuna. Now I feel complicated about Mommy Fortuna because I don't really like her. She's bad. She captures creatures and keeps them in cages. But she's a witch. **[Hannah laughs]** And she meets her end at the claws of a harpy. And you know what? That's pretty badass.

**Hannah McGregor** 02:56

Mommy Fortuna is the witch and The Last Unicorn, for those who have not yet watched The Last Unicorn and by yet, I mean it's your homework. Watch The Last Unicorn.

**Marcelle Kosman** 03:07

Voiced by Angela Lansbury.

**Hannah McGregor** 03:09

Yeah, Mommy Fortuna.

**Marcelle Kosman** 03:11

Incredibly slaps. I would like to take a moment to shout out not Glinda the Good Witch of the North specifically, but rather the fellows in that viral video where they are having a fight about whether or not Glinda the Good Witch of the North is a princess. Because that video brings me joy every single time I watch it.

[Soundbite from the classic video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7h4Aey-99E> ]

**Hannah McGregor** 03:51

That's an important video.

**Marcelle Kosman** 03:53

It is defining. It is culturally defining,

**Hannah McGregor** 03:57

A text of our modern moment. **[Marcelle laughs]** You know?

**Marcelle Kosman** 04:03

**[Marcelle imitates the video]** She came down in a bubble, dog. You couldn't tell me that I'm wrong?

**Hannah McGregor** 04:06

Sorry, is coming down in a bubble a witch thing or a princess thing?

**Marcelle Kosman** 04:10

No way to know. *[Hannah laughs]* No way to know.

**Hannah McGregor** 04:13

Well, that's all we know about witches.

*(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)*

**Marcelle Kosman** 04:30

Okay, well I feel like we could talk about witches and our favorite popular culture representations of witches and our favorite conversations that happen in pop culture about witches. I feel like we could talk about that all day. But if we want to impress our guest, we should get started on Revision.

**Hannah McGregor** 04:52

You know what? It's a great idea. And I think uncharacteristically we should begin with feminism.

**Marcelle Kosman** 04:59

Oh, gross... I'm just joking, please start.

**Hannah McGregor** 05:02

So specifically through the lens of feminist literary criticism we have continuously throughout this podcast applied pressure to dominant worldviews that are based in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. This is gonna sound familiar if you've been listening. And those dominant narratives are very good at naturalizing white supremacy, class hierarchies, the sex and gender binaries, heterosexual monogamy and capitalism in general, as these natural or inevitable systems rather than oppressive human made systems. And, of course, part of how these systems are naturalized is through narrative, particularly narratives that continuously cast straight white able bodied men as heroes, that portray queer, trans and racialized people as monstrous or aberrant or less than human, and that moralize wealth and class status by depicting them as rewards for virtuous behavior.

**Marcelle Kosman** 06:06

Woo boy, boy oh, boy. Yes, they do.

**Hannah McGregor** 06:12

They sure do, like so many of them. Huh?

**Marcelle Kosman** 06:16

I know. Okay, well, we've definitely talked about capitalism a few times. But I think that we might want to revisit this excellent quote from revolutionary Marxist Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, professor of African American studies at Princeton University, who defines capitalism as a system, quote, "based on the exploitation of the many by the few. Because it is a system based on gross inequality it requires various tools to divide the majority. Racism and all the oppressions under capitalism serve this purpose," end quote. So Taylor reminds us that we cannot understand the way capitalism generates artificial scarcity to keep us at each other's throats, without understanding racism as quote, "necessary to drive a wedge between workers who otherwise have everything in common and every reason to ally and organize together," end quote. Is it more true if I yell it? Yes.

**Hannah McGregor** 07:20

**[laughs]** Yeah, you can really tell when Marcelle believes something, when she yells a quote. We've also worked to understand some of these systems better by historicizing them.

**Marcelle Kosman** 07:29

Always historicize.

**[Soundbite of Coach singing:**

***"Historicize, historicize, it's always time to historicize!"*]**

**Hannah McGregor** 07:39

Through looking, for example, at the emergence of the nation state, as being connected to capitalism. So through Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, we looked at how modernity in Europe in particular, was characterized by the emergence of various systems that shook up the established feudal hierarchies, including the printing press, we know her well, scientific discovery, colonization or quote, unquote, "exploration". Which was a fun thing European nations like to call it. Vernacular religious texts, that's like the Bible in a language that isn't Latin. And alongside vernacular texts, rising literacy, and then eventually new print publics organized around newspapers, what Anderson calls print capitalism. And alongside all of these changes came the rise of nations as, again, the thesis is in the title, imagined communities.

**Marcelle Kosman** 08:40

I love it when the thesis is in the title. It's so helpful.

**Hannah McGregor** 08:43

So handy.

**Marcelle Kosman** 08:44

Okay, so speaking of historicizing-

**Hannah McGregor** 08:48

Always historicize.

**Marcelle Kosman** 08:49

-always historicize. We've also looked at the very concept of historicizing, or historical memory, how we remember events from the past. For example, do we memorialize European modernity through a series of great (read: white male wealthy thinkers who transformed the status quo)? Because that's certainly who we named streets and buildings and schools after.

**Hannah McGregor** 09:17

*[laughs]* We do.

**Marcelle Kosman** 09:18

That's not a quote, I'm just yelling. *[Both laugh]* But what about the experiences of all those living through modernity without leaving textual traces because they didn't have access to things like literacy or the emerging press? What do we know about them? And how, *how* Hannah, how do we know it?

**Hannah McGregor** 09:38

I actually don't know, Marcelle, but I think these are excellent questions. And I think it's time we maybe try to answer them.

**Marcelle Kosman** 09:48

Awesome. Let's do it.

*(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)*

**Hannah McGregor** 09:57

Alright, we've revised enough. It's time to get to the magic of learning new things and meeting new people in Transfiguration Class!

**Marcelle Kosman** 10:08

Our guest today is Dr. Niki Fitzgerald pronouns, she/her. Niki is an NHS doctor specializing in care of the elderly and general internal medicine. She has recently completed her master's in applied Medical Humanities at Birkbeck University of London. Her dissertation was titled "Is Medicine obsolete? An abolitionist feminist reimagining with flourishing and care".

**Hannah McGregor** 10:34

*[breathlessly]* Oh, sounds so good!

**Marcelle Kosman** 10:36

Niki also organizes with her local copwatch group who build community resistance to police powers and state violence. Yes, Niki. Yes! *[Hannah laughs]* She identifies as a Slyther-puff and lives in North London, England with her partner Lou and their dog Luna, who is all Ravenclaw. Welcome, Niki.

**Hannah McGregor** 10:59

Welcome, Niki.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 11:01

Thank you. It's amazing to be here.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:04

Oh my goodness. So nice to have you.

**Hannah McGregor** 11:06

I'm obviously gonna move like just lock in immediately on the most important part of that bio, which is what does it mean to have a dog that's a Ravenclaw? Is your dog answering riddles?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 11:16

Yeah, like literally, she's part collie. She's a rescue. But she looks mainly like a collie. And yeah, she can do riddles. She's very clever. She's cleverer than most of the children I know. And she had a different name when we went to the rescue place. When we took her for a little walk I just looked at her and was like, she's a Ravenclaw. Like, No, she can't be called that name. She is called Luna. And starting from now. *[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]*

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:43

Niki, do you want to start us off by telling us just a little bit about your relationship to Harry Potter and how you got the idea for this episode?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 11:52

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, Harry Potter has been like an absolutely enormous part of my life. Like since I was a very young child, I had the books all the way along. I used to reread them, like in advance of every new one coming out. So I've read the first one, like, innumerable times. And like increasingly, even in my adult life, at times of stress, I would do a comfort reread. So like when I was organizing some strikes as junior doctor strikes we did some years ago. And I got really stressed organizing.

I did a reread, but then a friend- shoutout to Sarah Trevi- who sent *Witch, Please* my way and that has been absolutely sort of imperative for me for like, helping me manage the shittiness of the author. And allowing me to have an ongoing complex relationship to what have been really important books in my life, because otherwise, like a sort of pre critical reading-me would have just been like, okay, Harry Potter is canceled now. But I'm also quite sad about that.

**Hannah McGregor** 12:56

Part of, I think, all of our ongoing relationship to the series, it's just being like, Okay, well, what do I do with this? What do I do with this thing that I love, and yet, and yet this author seems to keep getting worse?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 13:11

Yeah. So now I comfort re-listen to the original run of *Witch, Please* instead. ***[Marcelle laughs]***

**Hannah McGregor** 13:19

Not unproblematic in its own way, but much better intentioned, I think.

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:23

More willing to listen to feedback. ***[All three laugh]***

**Niki Fitzgerald** 13:28

100%.

**Hannah McGregor** 13:29

So your very exciting pitch for this episode is about witch hunts. But is there a connection to this work you've been doing in your *Masters in Medical Humanities*? Also, can you tell us, just for the listeners, what *Medical Humanities* is?



**Marcelle Kosman** 13:45

For the listeners. Not for us. We know...

**Niki Fitzgerald** 13:47

Yes. So Medical Humanities is studying medicine and actually, health. So like some people arguing we should actually call it the health humanities, because it's not all about the doctors. So it's studying medicine and health more broadly through the lenses of humanities. And as with I guess, quite a lot of fields, academic fields, there's like a few different schools of thought on what it is and like waves of what it has been and what it is now. So there's kind of like an original version, which is essentially old white men with elbow patches, saying doctors should read books because it would make them more empathetic to their patients. But I think from having read Hannah's book, we know that that's fully bullshit. *[Niki and Marcelle laugh]*

**Hannah McGregor** 14:35

*[laughs]* Another theory ruined.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 14:39

So yeah, I'm more into the critical and applied Medical Humanities, which is kind of really applying critical theory to medicine and health more broadly. And in that sense, I kind of think of Medical Humanities is to medicine what Witch, Please is to Harry Potter. Like weirdly, my masters was super aligned with the reboots, like so just be like, Oh, I've been set this book and you guys are talking about it on the podcast. It's like strangely mirroring. So.

**Hannah McGregor** 15:12

How did this lead to you studying witch hunts, though?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 15:15

Yeah, yeah. So I mean, one of the modules was going to look at and access a different practice from our own. And I kind of wrote, like, use that to reflect back on our original practice. And I kind of came to the conclusion throughout that module that my ideal practice would have been to actually sit in with a witch from like the time or just pre the witch burnings before she got burned. And so that was how I ended up reading a whole bunch about that time and about the witch hunts. And so yeah, this is definitely through a Medical Humanities lens and a way of like, accessing those histories as witches as healers, really.

**Hannah McGregor** 15:58

So what drew you to that conclusion, that you would really like to learn from an early modern witch?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 16:06

So I guess increasing dissatisfaction with like the heteronormative, this gendered white supremacist patriarchy that is, like, absolutely integral to medicine, and its histories and feeling very implicated in that as a medical practitioner and feeling increasingly aware of it and how it's operating. But nobody else is like talking about it, which is kind of how I got to the Masters. And that being like a really necessary way of me staying in touch, and being able to try and navigate away through that without having to just leave my job. And I guess, as I was like, working through some of that rage in a really, like, with a lot of trans studies, actually, is a really great way to access a whole bunch of rage.

I was like, you know, who was practicing before all of this bullshit? Witches. They were the community, you know, health care professionals and, well, not professionals. That's the point. Professionalism is a tool of the patriarchy. They're the community healers, essentially.

**Hannah McGregor** 17:20

Community Health Care amateurs.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 17:22

Yeah. Like, purposeful amateurs. *[laughs]*

**Marcelle Kosman** 17:25

Yeah! So Niki, for folks listening, who are really into this idea and want to learn more, is there a central text that you would recommend that's been kind of particularly important to your thinking and learning?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 17:41

Yeah, absolutely. So I would say there's two. One was the kind of gateway, which is an amazing pamphlet called "Witches, Midwives and Nurses" by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. And that was like, all self researched and published as part of the 1970s women's movement and women's health movement. And it's an amazing thing. But that sort of, I think, led to a more detailed study which comes from Sylvia Federici called *Caliban and The Witch*. And that really gives a big kind of overview and deep dive of the witch hunts and also their relationship to the capitalist transition.

**Hannah McGregor** 18:23

Sylvia Federici is one of those feminist thinkers whose name I know but I've never read any of her work. Can you give us a sort of in a nutshell, like who is she? Why is she important?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 18:35

Yeah, so she's Italian, but has worked, I think, works mainly in the United States and has spent some time in Nigeria. She describes herself as a feminist writer, teacher and militant. She's the co-founder of The International Feminist Collective and launched the Wages For Housework campaign internationally. So yeah, she's a Marxist feminist, and like *Caliban and the Witch* is her kind of really well known sort of seminal text.

**Hannah McGregor** 19:04

I am aware that there is this whole sort of Marxist, feminist theoretical world that is about labor, like reproductive labor, reproductive labor, that is the phrase that I sometimes hear Marxist feminists say as part of the feminist intervention into Marxism, and I'm like, I don't... I don't know what it means...

**Niki Fitzgerald** 19:33

I'm not a feminist Marxist and I think that's quite important to say right out as to like, I've been muddling through this also as like, because it was very important about the witch hunt. But yeah, I think she does talk about reproductive labor, like productive and reproductive and like, it's this idea that the like, reproduction of the worker so that is, you know, like the physical reproduction of having a baby. But also like feeding, clothing, making the worker able to go out to work, and how that has been essentially invisibilized, domesticated, and is unwaged and remains unwaged. And that was like, actually, that's going to be quite important to what we talk about. It's like one of the aims of the witch hunts was to drive women inside, in the house, reproducing workers for free when they weren't necessarily doing that before.

**Marcelle Kosman** 20:35

You made reference to a term that I don't understand. I've never heard the term "capitalist transition" before. And I feel like I could probably make an educated guess about what it is, but there's no way that I could possibly know whether or not I'm right. So can you please explain what the capitalist transition is? And then and then maybe talk about what it has to do with the witch hunts?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 21:00

Absolutely. Yeah. It's the transition to capitalism. *[All three laugh]*

**Marcelle Kosman** 21:06

I knew it! *[laughs]*

**Niki Fitzgerald** 21:00

But like, what it actually is your right to ask because it is contested. So I think capitalists would argue that the capitalist transition was just like, oh, Feudalism was bad, which was what was before capitalism. So then everyone just came out with this really good idea to just be capitalist instead. And then everything would naturally progress and be better in the future, and good for everyone.

**Hannah McGregor** 21:32

Yeah, we can all agree. Modernity is better. So capitalism is great.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 21:36

Yeah, that's what they'd say. *[All three laugh]*

**Hannah McGregor** 21:40

Not us, though, we're on to them.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 21:42

Yeah. So sort of accessing this history. And this transition is often an important part. This is what Federici says, anyway, of of a Marxist political education to try and kind of get back to that time and see how things can be or could have been otherwise to sort of explore how it came about and how the transition was actually enacted to also think about ways of resisting it.

**Hannah McGregor** 22:07

Because historicizing is a way of making the present non-inevitable.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 22:14

Absolutely, yeah. And that's what Federici actually does amazingly, because Marx omits the witch hunts. There's obviously a lot of omission in the Marxist history, kind of up until Federici, of what the deal was with how this affected women. And so it was an extremely necessary intervention to have a feminist reading of what was going on. And actually the sort of landscape that Federici paints of all the various stuff, resistance, pressure points, things that were going on, broadly and specifically for women. It's really illuminating and kind of, yeah, it's like this seething hotbed of lots of resistance in all these places. It's amazing.

**Hannah McGregor** 23:01

So it has never occurred to me before, to think about the witch hunts in relation to capitalism, I've always thought about it in relation to patriarchy, and the church. So this is, again, an exciting new idea for me. Can you sort of draw out that connection a little more? What did the witch hunts have to do with the capitalist transition? Why are those part of the same story?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 23:26

Yeah, well, I think that it's kind of maybe important first off to sort of go into some of that stuff that Federici was talking about historicizing, the lay of the land. And it then makes a bit more sense as to why it was where the witch hunts come in, and why it was so important, essentially, to control women in order to achieve it. So sort of another one of those like Marxist terms that you might have heard talked about, and not known what it was primitive accumulation. And she talks about it in *Caliban and the Witch*, and I had to look it up a whole lot and didn't really know either.

But that's sort of like the start of capitalism. And it's like, so primitive, it's like the early, the starting bit and accumulation, which is accumulating other people's stuff, which is stealing as far as I know. So basically, to get the initial capital to start doing capitalism, and like exchanging capital and making money and making more and more capital, they had to steal a bunch of stuff and take control over it. And so the things that needed to be accumulated or stolen, were land bodies...

**Hannah McGregor** 24:44

Like steal whole countries.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 24:47

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And the bodies that lived in those countries and those bodies, the time of those bodies. So yeah, land, bodies, labor, wealth, time. They're like some of the things that they were grabbing and stealing all over the place. And so obviously, each of those, like, particularly stealing other people's countries, like that could talk quite a lot about that. And you know, as a British person, there's a lot to be reckoned with in terms of the history of Britain stealing other people's countries like that. There were land grabs in terms of colonialism. But there was also like an initial land grab in the European countries where this was like coming out of-

**Marcelle Kosman** 25:29

Is this the enclosure movement?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 25:31

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So like-

**Hannah McGregor** 25:34

What's the enclosure movement? I don't know that thing.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 25:36

So the enclosure of the common lands, you might have heard of that before, like when you talk about in relation to that. So there were common lands, which like each village or community had common lands that they would have their own little bit of, but they would generally communally farm and make their own food. And actually, the weren't workers at the time, like feudalism weren't really paid in money, it was much more an exchange, and you got given plots of land for doing work. So then you could make your own food. So it's like, the kind of worker is much closer and produces themselves, they don't have to go through money to like, get what they need, but because capitalism required more land to commercially farm it, so they not only stopped giving people land, they also enclosed the common land, so they stole it.

And so then, that's kind of, in Marxist words, like the expropriation of the worker from the land. So that's like stealing the land, and then making them work on it for poverty wages, and then they have to buy the food that has been made out of the produce that they have been farming, which is, you know, kind of what happens now. So it's like, Federici talks about it causing this distancing between the worker and like, the means of production, aka the land where they make food. There was a lot at the time in feudalism, of like, resistance to feudalism itself. So there was like people kind of even like within those exchanges, people would just like, do it really slowly, like any work for the Lord, they would just like have all these like little ways of resisting and like there was the sort of low level resistance that Federici described, but then there's like right up to the like peasant revolts and the peasant wars where they're just like, This is bullshit. We don't want to work like this anymore. And so actually, Federici kind of describes the capitalist transition as like the ruling classes seeing, particularly the peasant revolts as a challenge to their power, and capitalism being a series of techniques for them to regain power and control over the peasants.

**Marcelle Kosman** 27:48

Oh, that's so interesting, because I feel like the way that I understand the transition from feudalism to capitalism, in my understanding, it's always been more like, oh, well, that's when the middle class emerged and took power from the aristocracy. But what you're saying is actually, these were tools that the aristocracy was able to use in order to continue to have control over the land and withhold it from the working classes.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 28:22

Absolutely. And they were peasants, they weren't even working classes. They didn't work for bosses, they did some work for the Lord, to get their plot of land so that they could farm but they were always trying to find ways to spend more time on their own land so they could make food for them and their family and their community. And like Federici talks about also the other affordances that were there. So there was, you know, common access to ponds, lakes, streams, forests for fuel, for catching fish. Like, it's actually much more in common with what we understand about traditional Indigenous ways of being in relation to the lands. And so these techniques were obviously then exported as part of colonialism.

**Hannah McGregor** 29:06

Yeah, yeah. And I know that that sort of project of colonialism, like England practiced it first on Wales and Scotland and Ireland, of like, enclosing the land, disrupting traditional relationships to the land, and then exporting the people whose land and livelihoods they disrupted to North America to perpetuate colonialism there. It's all sort of part of a continuous project.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 29:35

Yeah. And I think that's really important because we often think of them as like, or certainly, even when I was taught history at school, that's like, we talked about enclosure, like in one time, and then, like, a decade later, we're talking about like the Atlantic slave trade, and it's like, actually, it's all part of the same sort of thing.

**Hannah McGregor** 29:55

But Niki, what about the witches?

**Marcelle Kosman** 29:57

Where do the witches come in?

**Hannah McGregor** 29:58

Were they in those forests that the villagers were allowed to wander into?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 30:01

Absolutely, yeah. So part of the capitalist transition, like a really important part of it, was needing to control women. Partly because yeah, a lot of women were putting up a lot of resistance. So like I say, you kind of get this feeling of it being a lot of resistance everywhere all the time. And there is some argument that, you know, there were earlier revolts that then killed a lot of the men but the women kind of maintained those knowledges of the forms of resistance required. They also begin like heretic movement, which Federici actually describes more as, like a movement for social justice and like a

different way of doing Christianity that was less like, obviously bullshit, because at the time, they were, you know, taking money, you say, you pay us and we'll pray a bunch so that you can go to heaven. So the more you can pay us, the more brightly you go to heaven and that kind of thing. And now heretics were just like, that doesn't sound right.

So yeah, there were a lot of women active in the resistance. There was someone that Federici cites called Captain Dorothy, who I just love the idea of and she led a band of 37 women to fight off the enclosure of some mining land in Yorkshire. There are a number of reasons that women needed to be controlled. So we sort of, the resistance is a big one. But another one, as we kind of talked about, is for capitalism to have workers who are regularized and produced and able to go out to work, they wanted to push women into the domestic sphere and kind of make them do that work for free without labor, because a lot of women had been going out to work like this is, you know, it's mainly like a rural history that's given but Federici does talk about some of the urban stuff. And there were women working in guilds and things even earlier than this time. So it was like ways of forcing them into the domestic sphere, but also kind of making them into the domestic sphere and like controlling their sexuality, essentially, to make them repopulate after huge sort of decimations to the population through wars and all the revolts and the plague and starvation, and like because of huge taxation as well.

**Hannah McGregor** 32:20

So we want women who are afraid to be in public. And we want women not to know how to practice things like abortion.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 32:35

Exactly. So you want the women to be in the house, having the babies and not being able to control their fertility in any way. And I think between the pamphlet I mentioned earlier and Federici, you do get this real sense that, you know, the women who were community health practitioners were witches or wise women, and they definitely they were, you know, skilled in providing kind of medicinal or herbal ways for women to take control over their fertility. So it's sort of a double whammy. You want all the women to be frightened, but you particularly want to target the women who have access and knowledge to contraception and termination.

**Hannah McGregor** 33:17

So we got witch hunts.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 33:20

Yeah, exactly. And I think one of the important things about the witch hunts, because we already talked about it maybe being about religion is that the construction of the witch



does come from religion, from like Christianity, and sort of like the 14th century, but actually the witch hunts, they are state organized, they are not necessarily carried out by the church. There were laws passed that describe what a witch was, and made witchcraft a crime. So, the witch was maybe first sort of described in the 14th century, the witch hunts were actually in the 16th and 17th century. And that's where there were state organized trials of hundreds of 1000s of women where they were, you know, tortured, put on trial, and then burnt at the stake.

**Hannah McGregor** 34:09

Learning about witch hunts as a teenager is what first radicalized me.

**Marcelle Kosman** 34:13

Oh, interesting.

**Hannah McGregor** 34:14

Yeah, I still remember reading about them and being like, sorry, wait, sorry. Just 1000s of women were systematically and legally murdered? Why isn't everybody more upset about this? That is really I feel like whatever the thing is that radicalizes you, that feeling of Wait, why aren't people more upset about this? tends to be the sort of first sensation. Wait a minute. Shouldn't we all be angry? Why isn't everybody else angry? And another feminist is born. *[Niki laughs]*

**Marcelle Kosman** 34:48

Okay, can I do some re-piecing together, just to make sure that I'm following because there are so many moving parts to this history. So the capitalist transition steals land and people and resources. People were already unhappy with feudalism. Fair. Doesn't sound great. Capitalism was an opportunity to reassert authority over the people unhappy with feudalism. People continued to resist this, and the ways in which women were resisting were particularly unruly, and the state was able to enact laws to disempower these women. And, in so doing, move them more into a domestic sphere, where they, now thoroughly disempowered, are literally reproducing the capitalist system by having babies and raising children and not being able or allowed to do anything else. Am I following?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 36:07

Absolutely. Yeah.

**Hannah McGregor** 36:08

What a good student.

**Marcelle Kosman** 36:11

Okay, so here's my question, I often find that I talk about the state and I don't always know who I'm talking about when I say "the state". So in this situation, where the state is enacting these laws to torture and assassinate women, torture and murder women, is the state, the aristocracy? Or the church? Or a combination, or new like capitalist landowners? Or a combination? Who is the state?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 36:45

It's difficult to say, I think, basically, part of the transition was reconfiguring those relationships. So part of it is the aristocracy. But there are like pacts made between the aristocracy, the church, I guess, a form of central government that's related to the crown. That was the kind of feeling I got from reading it. But the details are a bit sketchy. But yeah, I think that the important point to me is that we so often are like, Oh, God, the church is terrible. And they enacted all of it, because it's often depicted in popular culture as being priests and priests did conduct trials, but it's much more of a coalition. And they are state documents that people are uncovering in archives, and looking at with a different eye now, to sort of say, Hang on, what the fuck is up with that?

**Hannah McGregor** 37:39

Yeah, yeah. And I mean, I think a useful reminder is that this is a period before really much articulation of the separation between church and state. Right? Which is like a sort of later revolutionary idea. And so, you know, when we look at the relationship between, say, the monarchy and the church, part of the point was that the Monarch was the representative of God on earth. So like, those are not really divided. But my understanding of the state is that it's literally whatever body imposes laws. So it's like, okay, well, whoever is in a position to claim that they are the one who gets to make laws and then punish people for breaking them is the state.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 38:30

Yeah, I think that kind of marries up with my reading from Federici, because a Lord of the Manor could just have a bunch of trials and trial a load of women and burn them all.

**Hannah McGregor** 38:41

Yeah, you get to declare yourself the state if you have the largest police force, the state is whoever makes laws and can enforce them. And you enforce them through policing, which is why the Sheriff of Nottingham is such an important foundational village.

**[Marcelle laughs]** Literature's first cop.

**Marcelle Kosman** 39:05

Oh, boy, I learned so much from Disney. You know?

**Hannah McGregor** 39:07

Here is another question as close to my heart as the question of what the state is, and that is the question about magic. Which is, sometimes when we talk about the witch burnings, we people, not me, but people will sort of frame what was irrational about the witch burnings through asserting that the women were not really witches. And claims that they were doing magic were false or invented or hysterical. So I guess what is Federici's stance on magic, and the sort of quote unquote realness of witchcraft? And maybe, what's yours, if it's different from Federici's, or the same?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 40:04

Yeah, I actually have a quote, she said, "The witch hunt was also crucial to the erasure of magic as a universe of practices, beliefs and social subjects whose existence was incompatible with capitalist work discipline."

**Hannah McGregor** 40:19

Wait, so magic is irreconcilable with capitalism?

**Marcelle Kosman** 40:22

Incredible.

**Hannah McGregor** 40:23

Hot.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 40:24

Yeah, part of her argument is that it wasn't just witches as maybe some wise women or some older women who were, you know, really pissed off that they'd been dispossessed from their land and poor relief. It's that this was a widespread system of belief and practices that we would now call superstition. But we've been made to think that it's superstition, because of the concerted campaign against this way of understanding the world and that it's much more in touch with the affordances of nature and the land. And I think much more connected with the land and your own body is the way that I see it.

This interesting example that she sort of uses to illustrate this as being kind of anathema to the capitalist work ethic is that there were superstitious days, there were lucky days and unlucky days. And if it's an unlucky day, you don't leave the house, you just stay home. And you can't have a capitalist job where people have to go every day to the same place for the same hours. If they're just not going to turn up because, but

unlike, that's a much better way of being in the world, like today is an unlucky day, I need to stay home.

**Marcelle Kosman** 41:35

Every day under capitalism is an unlucky day. As far as I'm concerned.

**Hannah McGregor** 41:40

*[laughs]* I feel like we're seeing a little bit of this returning with the rise of astrology, and the way people will be like, um, so I actually can't go to work today because mercury is in retrograde. Sorry, I actually just, I actually just can't. I can't do that meeting. Sorry. Mercury's in retrograde. Sorry.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 42:00

And I'm totally into it. Because yeah, if you're in a Pisces season, there are some things you just shouldn't be discussing. Right?

**Hannah McGregor** 42:07

So, with all of this in mind, it's really interesting to think about how the witch hunts are represented. And like how we, you know, we've been talking about historical memory, like, how is this period memorialized? And how do we talk about the witch hunts?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 42:27

Yeah, I think Federici in particular in her later work is really mad about how we talk about it. And that comes through in *Caliban and the Witch* and I enjoyed that as another way of accessing rage during the piece of work I was doing and it's just, as you said, Hannah, when you're just like, what, why aren't we more angry about this? Because it's often just represented, like, I mean, in popular culture, it's often like a comic device or, but there's even, you know, Federici quotes a history of psychiatry that was written in like, the 1970s that sort of describes all the witches as being like hysterical mad women who'd now be in an asylum.

So it's like, oh, there was nothing wrong with burning all those women. They were mad. And that's fine. We'd lock them up now instead, rather than be like, what might have been going on as to why the whole of western Europe decided to burn swathes of its population. And I think that the other point that Federici has mentioned in recent interviews is that, you know, there are sites of witch burnings where there are museums. And in the gift shop, you can just buy a doll of a witch that's all green and old and LOL, but there's like, no other kind of mass killing-

**Hannah McGregor** 43:46

-of state sponsored murder-

**Niki Fitzgerald** 42:47

-where you then buy a comical toy in the gift shop.

**Hannah McGregor** 43:52

I mean, that also makes me think about the way that like Indigenous iconography is sold as tourist trash on stolen Indigenous lands. The flavor is the same. Yeah. Well, I obviously want to dig more into this question of the memorialization of witch hunts and cultural representations of witch hunts. And lucky for us, we've got this shared text that talks about witch hunts that we can use. Do you want to go do that now?

**Marcelle Kosman** 44:27

I think that's a fantastic idea, Hannah.

***(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)***

Are we all ready to test our knowledge by seeing what new dimensions of the Harry Potter books this knowledge elucidates? I hope so. Because that's exactly what we do in OWL's! ***[Sound effect of an owl hooting]***

**Hannah McGregor** 44:54

Okay, so, when I first sort of saw this pitch, the thing that came to mind immediately was that part in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban where Harry has been assigned an essay about why 14th century witch burning was pointless, I guess, because you can't burn real witches and so I guess they only burned innocent people? I don't... ***[Hannah gasps in befuddlement]***

**Niki Fitzgerald** 45:22

It's extremely troubling like this one I read in *Caliban and the Witch* that I like immediately had to write to you because it was just like, Oh God, this is horrifying. Like the idea that there's these witches who are just at a stake next to some Muggle women. Or are they muggles? But next to some other women who are being burnt alive, and they're just like, This is so fun.

**Hannah McGregor** 45:48

Yeah, you've helpfully included for us the language from the book here, which reads, "The witch or wizard would perform a basic flame freezing charm, and then pretend to shriek with pain while enjoying a gentle tickling sensation. Indeed, Wendelin the Weird enjoyed being burnt so much that she allowed herself to be caught no fewer than 47

times in various disguises.” The idea that witch burnings were mostly jokes, and that the witches were letting themselves be caught is so sinister, if you think through even one implication.

**Niki Fitzgerald 46:36**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, because it even says like on the rare occasions that they caught a real witch. So it's like Muggles are so stupid. They just are catching all these not real witches. But if they do catch a real one, they're just, it's still a figure of fun. And even the witch who enjoyed it, like she's kind of being mocked in this real misogynist tone. Wendelin the Weird, like, she's so weird. And aren't women stupid?

**Hannah McGregor 47:05**

And also, if it was a rare occasion that they caught an actual witch a lot of women were being murdered.

**Niki Fitzgerald 47:13**

And they knew about it, and they didn't just go and help? Stop them?

**Hannah McGregor 47:19**

Yeah, yeah. Instead, they cosplayed as them for fun.

**Marcelle Kosman 47:25**

This feels very much like one of those many ways in which the novels, if you put a little bit of pressure on them and think through the implications are so unbelievably hateful, but kind of in the way that they just reproduce the same ideologies that we already have, right? Like we already don't trust women, we already love to ridicule the idea of difference. And then to add to that, this history that Niki, you've shared with us from Sylvia Federici's work really, in a lot of ways, frames this not just as a kind of horrifying, ridiculous representation of an actually terrible thing that happened to 1000s of people. But it's also very silly, but like, silly, and I don't know how to... I don't know.

**Niki Fitzgerald 48:26**

Yeah. When you start to really think through the witch hunts, and humanize the women who've been murdered by the state, you know, and think of them as actual kind of peasant women at the time. But I guess what we might think of, you know, proletariat women, you know, working class women, and you actually think of them as real, it just becomes untenable to read this in any other way than it's completely horrible. And I guess that's what it's sort of showing us is that there has been none of that thought and it also really reproduces that divide, the wizard muggle divide, that's whatever they're up

to is separate. And it's silly. Yeah, muggles are silly. Women are silly. Even the witches in our own side are kind of silly, but like, so that's the spectrum of it.

**Marcelle Kosman** 49:18

Yeah. Yeah. And like, thinking about the fact that so many of these women would have been like what we would today think of as activists. It's also really horrifying to realize that this is a pop culture reference to like, exterminating activists. And that's really... it leaves me speechless, like I'm so disgusted. Yeah. And like, has Rowling read Sylvia Federici? Probably not. But then that just kind of, in a lot of ways it just makes it worse.

**Hannah McGregor** 49:59

It's also part of this sort of larger through line in the whole book series that we've talked about, like, the worst villains are the ones who have nothing but disdain for Muggles. But the book series itself has nothing but disdain for muggles. And this is, you know, this is one of many, like this makes a joke of the mass murder of muggle women and activists who were doing like, you know, and the political events that were unfolding at the time and I'll let you know it just becomes a sort of goofy joke in a way that aligns with how everything we see of the muggle world is dismissed, derided. The muggle characters that we're introduced to are, at best, silly and at worst, outright villainous. And it is what sort of one of those profound irreconcilable aspects of this book series for me is just like, the series at a narrative level is espousing the very fascist beliefs that we're supposed to be rejecting.

**Marcelle Kosman** 51:11

I mean, I guess that makes sense. Like, in a lot of ways, of course it does, because those fascist beliefs are, as we have come to learn, are the logical extension of our own liberal ideologies, right? Like that's, so it makes sense that you can't divorce fascism from liberalism, but it's that the inherent contradictions are unconscious, or that the series itself is ignorant of the inherent contradictions, you know?

**Hannah McGregor** 51:39

Okay. So speaking of structural ignorance in the series, can we talk about what we know from the books about what was going on in the wizarding world around the time of the witch burnings? Other than this one sort of hilarious anecdote we got about Wendelin the Weird, what else was going on in the wizarding world while muggles were burning women?

**Niki Fitzgerald** 52:08

Yeah. Because this is what also doesn't make sense about Harry's question is that it says which burnings in the 14th century, which were not really actually happening, it

was mainly in the 16th and 17th century. So I think that leaves a big question. And what was going on in the 17th century was the international statute of secrecy. So from some fandom searching and not going back through all of the text, it's this international statute of secrecy was 1689 and fully instituted in 1692. So that is in like, the height of the witch burnings.

**Hannah McGregor** 52:44

Yeah. And that's the like, official separation of the wizarding world and the muggle world where it becomes like, we don't let them know that we exist.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 52:52

Exactly. And it's the kind of again, there's not an awful lot said about it. But it sort of also doesn't totally make sense, because what it says is, it was for the protection of the wizards that they were being treated increasingly in a hostile manner by the muggles, which would then, even if you sort of buy that as an official line is like, Well, surely you're talking about the fact they're trying to burn all the magical people. And so you decide that would be quite a reasonable thing to do is to decide to go completely underground, because you want to stop particularly the women in your community from being tortured and murdered. Yeah, on a regular.

**Hannah McGregor** 53:39

So, so reasonable to be like, Oh, what's a good reason that in the 1600s, wizards would suddenly be like, maybe we need to not let muggles see us do magic, like, oh, maybe it's the witch burnings. Maybe that's, maybe that's the one. But it is weird, isn't it? That it's the wizards who created the statute of secrecy, but witches who were being burned...

**Niki Fitzgerald** 54:07

Exactly. I'm just like, there's something up with that for sure. And like, to my mind, in my reading, it's like, I think there's just like the Malfoys like the landed gentry of the wizarding world doing a complete power grab on the magic so like, to my mind this is you actually blur the line. It's like magic was real. Magic was a system of beliefs that was, you know, widely practiced, particularly amongst the peasantry, and witches and wizards that were living cheek by jowl with muggles. So like, actually, if it was a widespread system of beliefs, there probably wasn't such a thing as a muggle.

That was probably a category created after the international statutes of secrecy. And so they were all living together. And then as part of capitalism, they needed to get rid of magic, and there's the Malfoy's up at the manor being like, hang on, I can see a sort of way through that we can get around this and they sign up with the state to say, Okay,



some of us will keep some power and some magic and we'll go underground while you crack on and burn all the proletariat, all the peasantry.

**Marcelle Kosman** 55:19

Yeah. And you know, this makes so much sense. When I think back to the conversation that we had years ago with our friend, Andrea Hazenbank when she talked about the mode of production in the wizarding world and how, I believe she saw it as being feudal. And not... Well, it's definitely not capitalist, but I think she argued that it was feudal or like, slightly post feudal. I can't remember exactly how she phrased it, but...

**Niki Fitzgerald** 55:49

Was it artisanal?

**Marcelle Kosman** 55:50

Oh, you would know Niki, what did Andrea say? *[All three laugh]*

**Niki Fitzgerald** 55:56

I did not listen to that episode in my revision, but I remember it. Yeah, artisanal. And that was part of feudalism, is that there were, you know, people who worked the land, but there were also artisans like skilled makers, so yeah, that would definitely tie in.

**Hannah McGregor** 56:13

Huh. Yeah. Yeah. It also ties into that conversation we had with Ella McLeod on a bonus interview about cats and, and the way that cats hang out with squibs which suggests like the presence of these magical animals with squibs is sort of a reminder that like the difference between a muggle and a wizard or a muggle, wizard, and a squib is, it is a state imposed distinction that operates through the totally undivided, like functionally undivided system of the Ministry for Magic and Hogwarts. Because those are like, you know, Dumbledore tries a little bit to resist those integrated systems, but they're pretty integrated, like Hogwarts is state education. It's state funded and state run education.

And your admission into Hogwarts is what triggers your access to a wand, your access to magic, your access to this whole world and all of its infrastructure. You know, a wand is what makes you a subject in the eye of the wizarding state. So the international statute of secrecy becomes this, like very clear, like, some rich families are now going to decide who gets to count as magic and who doesn't. Which is why we should not be fantasizing about getting our Hogwarts letters, but rather should be fantasizing about dismantling the entire system that Hogwarts represents.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 57:51

Yeah, I mean, there was just one other point I was going to make and I don't know if it will feed in is that it actually is has some really strong resonances with the expropriation of witches, women as healthcare professionals by uneducated upper class, medical professionalized doctor so it became like licensed, you had to have a degree from a university. And actually, witches were burned for curing people. Like you didn't have to be a bad witch even if you gave good health care, that still proved you are a witch because you killed people, so they burnt you for cure in your community.

And there were often male scientific doctors overseeing some of the trials to make sure they weren't like, I don't know, like scientific or proper. And so yeah, I see a real kind of parallel of the upper class male professionalized doctors, casting out their health providing witches and the Malfoys kind of spawning in and professionalizing and maybe making the magic more scientific because we see it kind of requires this book learning, this theory requires apparatus like a wand, it ties in with that kind of enlightenment renaissance. And you can imagine a Malfoy ancestor being all up in that.

**Hannah McGregor** 59:16

Yeah, yeah. And that sort of official magic is distinguished from the sort of dangerous unofficial magic that is done by other magical creatures who work without wands and so, like, can't be trusted.

**Marcelle Kosman** 59:33

Like even if we think about Madame Pomfrey. She's the Hogwarts Matron. But everything about her realm in Hogwarts is hospitalized. Right? So it's all very, like Western scientific study of medicine, sort of hospital wing. It's even called the hospital wing, isn't it? And yet, like you've got Professor Sprout was literally growing all kinds of herbs and everything. But there's a very clear division between Professor Sprout who does the growing. And then madam Pomfrey, who is authorized to do the administering.

**Niki Fitzgerald** 1:00:15

And yet it also requires Snape to do the wolfsbane potion. Like, why can't Madame Pomfrey do the wolfsbane potion?

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:00:23

Why can't Madame Rosmerta make it? I bet you she'd brew up a flagon in no time.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:00:30

Why is that knowledge controlled? Why is it restricted? Right? All of the systems of restriction and control. What a bummer.

**(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)**

Thank you, witches for joining us for another episode of Witch, Please. If you have questions, comments, concerns, or praise, praise, mostly praise, you can come hang out with us at ohwitchplease on Instagram or Twitter. And of course, always the best way to get more of us and to praise us is to go to [patreon.com/ohwitchplease](https://patreon.com/ohwitchplease), where you can get so much content. And also, most excitingly, help us figure out what we're going to do next after we finish this reread of the Harry Potter books. Because you know, we want to know from you, you specifically, if you think I'm talking to you right now, I am. It's you.

If you don't do social media, no worries. We have a newsletter to keep you in the loop for all of our adventures. And you can sign up on our website. Also, please read my book. It's called *A Sentimental Education*. And it's good and Niki read it. And you want to be cool like Niki. Also Marcelle read it and you want to be cool like Marcelle, also Coach read it. And you want to be cool, like Coach, everybody who's cool reads it. This is what I'm saying. Venn diagram perfect circle.

**Marcelle Kosman 1:02:00**

Witch, Please is distributed by Acast. You can find the rest of our episodes on Acast or at [a witchplease.ca](https://www.witchplease.ca). Which, as a website, I gotta say is expanding faster than the universe every day thanks to our awesome newest team member Gaby. You can find transcripts, merch, and you can sign up for our newsletter. You gotta, you gotta go. Just check it out. You'll love it. Special thanks, as always, to our executive producer Hannah Rehak, aka Coach **[Sound effect of a sports whistle blows]** to our social media manager and marketing designer, Zoe Mix **[Sound Effect of a record player rewinding]**, and to our sound engineer, Eric Magnus.

**Hannah McGregor 1:02:53**

At the end of every episode, we shout out everyone who left us a five star review on Apple podcasts. And I gotta say I think that we accidentally got found by some misogynist because we have been getting kind of a spate of one star reviews with people calling the podcast woke nonsense, so we need you to drown them out.

**Marcelle Kosman 1:03:15**

When did woke nonsense become a criticism?

**Hannah McGregor 1:03:18**

I'm proudly a proud producer of woke nonsense, but please help us drown them out by reviewing us. And as a special perk. If you review us you get to hear Marcelle *coming out of our cage, but doing just fine*.

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:03:34

Thanks this week to: Kas9du, Pana Markotsis, KasmiraJ, and SV in WA. We'll be back next episode to add to the appendices. But until then...

**Niki Fitzgerald** 1:03:49

Later witches!