

Hey, so this is more than a little awkward. The show is back but late after its unannounced and largely unaddressed hiatus. I think I may owe you, dear listener, an explanation of what has happened, even if it's not a very good.

Most of my formative years in terms of my writing were spent working on fiction, and to this day, I spend more time on fiction writing than nonfiction writing. And now, I don't feel as comfortable writing nonfiction type content. To me, the skill just isn't there, but it's a fairly important endeavor. It's important to get nonfiction writing right. No pun intended. And this episode is a prime example of that need.

Basically, this episode is one I found hard to write because the history of witch-craft accusations and trials is a complicated one. I think it's easy to see the bigger picture, especially if you've read or seen *The Crucible*. Witchcraft accusations would often conveniently fall against other social cracks or divides. Yes, *The Crucible* is a work of fiction, but the historical record would suggest that the opportunist nature of the characters in that story is a part of the human experience and has always been. Saying that is easy, but this episode needs to do more than that. And yet, it can't do too much because of the nature of the project.

And so... I got cold feet on the script draft that was supposed to go live six weeks ago. And my shakened confidence extended to the other scripts I had done, so I couldn't even swap one out. Shaken confidence quickly became no confidence, and confidence is required to make stuff. At least some level of contextually specific confidence, anyway.

Honestly, I did think about deleting this feed. And I don't know why I didn't. I don't know why I decided to hit the books again and make this episode and all the later ones

happen. I guess, I'm still determined to try and make this work? So thanks for bearing with me and sticking around. And for giving this show a chance in the beginning.

(Pause. Music fades in)

The book that Maximo Ramos wrote on the Aswang is an irreplaceable resource for anyone curious about this legend. Ramos was a genius scholar who was clearly invested in the act of preserving his culture and his heritage. And so, through talent and effort, Ramos manufactured quite the cultural achievement. I've certainly been a bit dependent on it, as you've probably noticed. So far, it was the only resource I had, but it was also largely the only one I've needed in order to explain to you what a Filipino means when they invoke the name of the Aswang. And hey, as far as a resource dependence goes, relying on Ramos wasn't a terrible thing. He was an impeccable scholar--thorough but succinct--and this work is a reflection of that skill. But it is also a reflection of his weakness, which did not, so much, stem from any failure on his part but was interwoven into the discipline that bore him.

Now maybe there are more implications to that than what I'm going to explain, and maybe as a phenomenon, it's something that I should be more responsive to. But as it stands, when talking about this fourth face of the aswang, Ramos's inheritance of a misconception carried by the discipline itself becomes abundantly clear. It's not so much that he makes the same mistake, but as he tries to orient himself relative to the established literature, he fails to see the problem in the canon about European witches and their trials.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

I didn't mean it, okay? If you aren't going to listen to me. At least hear that.

I never meant for it to happen, you know? I never meant for any of this to happen. I just wanted what everyone like me wants: to be left alone. Really. Okay, maybe they don't. Maybe they want other things. They have different reasons. I know others like me who have done very bad things, but that was their choice. Not mine. I would never. I...

I just got mad. That's all. I try not to get that way, but it's hard for me. Everyone's always known what I was, and they hated me for it. And it wasn't fair. It doesn't justify what I did. I know I'm sorry. But I--I can't help being what I am. I can't help it.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

Once again, we have a familiar being. Human beings don't differ from each other too dramatically. We have a similar set of weaknesses, strengths, and limitations otherwise unspecified. From those, our fears sprout forth. Consequently, human fears and nightmares transcend borders, cultural differences, and other sorts of boundaries, so it should be no surprise that this parallel creation can and did happen, across the ocean and across time.

The fourth face of the Aswang is that of a witch--a loaded term if there ever was one. And Ramos isn't spared from this. He goes as far as to admit that he was influenced--as many Filipinos were--by the imagery and ideas surrounding the witch and witchcraft that were brought to the islands by Spain. And assuming Ramos reported these ideas accurately--which I do trust that he did--he certainly lacked awareness of what the broader problem was with Europe's witches or the accusation therein.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

My whole life, I knew to stay away from people, from your town. For everything that matters to you. The little shack where you found me? Deep in the woods and past the fields where you all grow your bananas? That's where I was born. My mother had me by herself. I don't think I ever had a father. He was never around. My mother never spoke of him. He was just gone.

There was no time to dwell on that, though. She had to teach me how to act, how to conduct myself around you all. And she did do that. She did teach me that. None of this was her fault. Why won't you leave her alone?

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

"Unlike the European witches, however, the Philippine witch has no appetite for human flesh," Ramos writes, and that was the line that told me something was wrong. Because, while I certainly am not an expert in European witch trials. I knew that wasn't the common accusation. Witchcraft accusations always came with an additional charge, but that charge wasn't always about eating human flesh. That is to say, if you were accused of being a witch, it was because you caused harm in one way or another. In 1572, a witchcraft trial in what is present-day Germany started with the death of a child, as an example. But the child wasn't killed to be consumed.

It wasn't so much that a witch committed actual, tangible harm in her community or that you had human meat in the pot on the fire of her home. Some historians point out a link between witchcraft and heresy. Heresy by then had no longer classified as an act that could be repented from but more of a crime that would be the religious equivalent of treason. It wasn't a mistake so much as a rejection of God and all that was good, like the Church itself.

On the other hand, theories concerning witchcraft, specifically what it meant for someone to be a witch, were also evolving. For a while, the forces of magic typically used by witches were seen as forces that existed within that nature that was created by God--per some definitions--but was not meant for humans to wield. It wasn't automatically a crime, per say, but then came this belief that witchcraft wasn't a neutral act but a way to harm others, by cursing one's neighbors, as an example, also known as the practice of malefice. And this had to be part of or derived from an active pact with the Devil. Not God but the Devil. You were turning away from God, which made this an act of heresy and not just an accident by the ignorant. But even though handbooks like the *Malleus Maleficarum* existed and were fairly well-spread, the act of accusation took on a very different form. It was evolving, in and of itself, seemingly for the worse.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

It's hard to be isolated. It's hard to feed ourselves. We had a little farm with some chickens. And we weren't far from the waterways that had both fish and water. We had enough to sustain us. But that was assuming nothing changed. But you know the rainy season was bad this year, right? That's where it all started. The rain was so bad, and our crops were washed out. Then the chickens drowned. Everything went wrong.

We had a bit of money. Not from any curses, alright? We just had extra eggs every so often. And they'll go bad if we don't sell them, so we're willing to sell them for very little. And then we don't use the money, so it accumulates. And then when things got bad like that, we were supposed to go to the market. So that's what I was going to do. But they wouldn't leave me alone.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

Generally speaking, witch hunts weren't about a mob getting a taste of collective power and going rabid with it. This wasn't a community turning on itself in a frenzy. Witches were simply scapegoats, seen to be at fault for some larger catastrophe or tragedy, and the logic, though dangerous, is somewhat understandable. Terrible, very, very terrible, but understandable. If hardships could be tied to a small group as the source of it all, then the solution was with that group as well. And it's unfortunate that it was a violent one, but it was one that could come particularly easy when it came to those ostracized for other reasons like Agnes Bernaur was. She was both a peasant and the lover of the heir to the throne of Bavaria, and what a dangerous combination that was. Her condemnation as a witch was likely at the behest of the man's father who would have likely thought that removing such a blemish on his son's honor was worth any cost, especially that of a particular type of human life.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

I kept my eyes down, and I had a head scarf on that was pulled low onto my face. My mother taught me what to do, I swear. I don't even know how they knew about me. Or how they recognized me. They never saw my eyes. But then they just started shoving me around. And yelling but I couldn't tell what they were saying. They were all talking at once, but they were saying something about me. At me. To me. I don't know. And then they started acting like they were going to swing at me. Or beat me. And-- It wasn't fair, okay? I know they're going to tell you that they weren't actually going to hit me, but they wouldn't even pretend to hit anyone else. They wouldn't swing at a lady. And if they did, their mothers would have snapped them up and beat them senseless.

Why was I the exception? And I know you think you have an answer to that, but I didn't ask to be born this way. It wasn't my choice.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

Filipino witches--or the aswangs that more closely resemble witches--are characterized as having that same sort of social vulnerability, living alone and on the outskirts of town. But unlike European witches, these aswangs have a clear and indisputable marker: their eyes, whose pupils are long and thin like a cat's. And so these aswangs have to avert their eyes at all times, lest they be spotted and face the dreaded sting ray's tail. Much like the weredog, that particular instrument is capable of bringing about their end.

(Extended- Music fades out and new music fades in)

I didn't know what he grabbed. I just... I just saw him grab something. Something I was afraid of. How was I supposed to see what he grabbed without looking at him? I was scared. I had reason to be scared. Okay? Just like you're afraid of me right now. What difference did it make? You'd do the same thing to me. You would do worse to me. You're bringing me here and asking me these things to justify it. But you'll do it regardless. Just admit it. Well? Well?

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

Filipinos don't have a history of seeking out witches. Quite the contrary. Ramos explains that the Filipino tendency to not look directly in the eyes of those around you as you walk was a way of making it clear that you were not searching for witches, that you were content to keep to yourself and out of trouble. It was part of a cultural truce that

was had, seemingly, between the witch-based aswangs and the people: stay out of each other's way and out of trouble. And all will be well.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

Searching for the Aswang is a production of Hugot Podcasting, which itself is a division of Miscellany Media Studios. This show is researched, written, hosted, and produced by MJ Bailey with music from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. See you in two weeks.

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