

## Medieval European Witchcraft and the Perception of Women in Select Philippine Short Stories

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### Abstract

This study addresses the persistent narrative of witchcraft-related violence in the contemporary era by delving into its historical root – the medieval practice of witch-hunts. It investigates gendered motifs linked to women accused of witchcraft and sorcery, using Morgan le Fay in Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* as a reference. By examining gender stereotypes, we aim to demonstrate how medieval European concepts of witchcraft and sorcery have become entrenched in modern perceptions of women. This investigation employs Philippine literary texts – *The Witch* by Edilberto Tiempo and *May Day Eve* by Nick Joaquin, characterising women exhibiting postcolonial dispositions. Our central hypothesis holds that these contemporary stories adapt the medieval classic. The findings point to the medieval traces in the characters of Minggay and Agueda, leading to their societal categorisation as metaphorical witches. Textual analysis exemplifies strategies such as “un/belonging” the self to demonstrate “herstory,” acknowledging one’s beliefs to express innate tendencies, and challenging social structures to promote reclamation of oppressive structures. This study contributes to understanding the challenged “mythical” nature of women’s identity in the modern era. Hence, the adaptive platform of medieval European

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influence lends support to stabilising women's positionality rather than their essentiality.

### **Keywords**

Feminist mythology, medieval shadow, metaphorical witch, positionality vs. essentiality, postcolonialism and magic

### **Introduction**

The history of witchcraft, sorcery, and witch-hunting spans diverse geographies, deeply embedded in patriarchal narratives. Its strong association with women renders it significant in gender studies. Countless women persecuted in Europe between 1430 and 1780 because of accusations of witchcraft (Ankarloo et al. 22-26; Federici 164). Marginalised women, due to factors such as age, physical disability, widowhood, or poverty, were often scapegoated as bearers of evil. This perception was rooted in societal norms, religious beliefs, and gender roles.

Prominently, gendered themes associated with women accused of witchcraft are reflected in the portrayal of Morgan le Fay in Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. The comparative analysis of Morgan and two female characters in Philippine literary texts – *May Day Eve* by Nick Joaquin and *The Witch* by Edilberto Tiempo – aims to trace common motifs between Southeast Asian and European perspectives on witchcraft, emphasising the depiction of women as “marginalised.” The study's central hypothesis is that these contemporary stories essentially adapt the medieval classic.

Firstly, it is crucial to establish the context strongly linked to medieval Europe, where witch-hunting of women was widespread. Secondly, explaining the Eurocentric principle concerning Southeast Asia's reception of witchcraft and sorcery demonstrates the Western influence in the Global South, with the Philippines as a site of replication. Postcolonial and feminist implications are significantly considered to layer women's experiences and their environment within the discourse of witchcraft accusation. Thirdly, textual analysis alongside these perspectives is conducted to uncover medieval influences in characterising postcolonial society, positioning the “marginalised” at its core.

This investigation delves into how the environment's treatment of woman as the “other” shapes her experiences and eventually creates her new identity. In the end, there is an affirmation of the idea that the past communicates with the present and vice versa in that medieval European constructs are embedded in select Philippine fiction. More importantly, there is a heightened sensitivity to the inextricable forces of gender and power that operate on a sustained trajectory across linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions.

## Witchcraft and sorcery in Europe during the Middle Ages

Witchcraft has been a human attempt to explain the unknown around the world since ancient times. The current perception often links it closely to medieval Europe, evolving from societal fears, religious beliefs, and power dynamics of that era. Today, it reminds us of the devastating consequences of baseless accusations against women and the collective hysteria of history.

Witchcraft involves practices believed to harness occult forces through supernatural entities. Over time, the concept of a witch has evolved into traditional and modern categories. The traditional witch, rooted in ancient legends, epics, and fairy tales, signifies a nuanced and historically rich representation (Emiroğlu and Aydın 174). Examining the etymology of “witch” will provide linguistic insights and clarify the cultural and societal contexts of the term. This analysis enhances the understanding of how perceptions of witchcraft have evolved, encompassing both linguistic and cultural dimensions.

The Middle English term “wicche” traces back to “wiccan” in Old English, meaning “to practice witchcraft,” with “wicca” for men and “wicce” for women (Penczak 9). While historically witch applied to both genders, over time, witchcraft became increasingly associated with women (Jilg 37). Medieval sorcery and witchcraft, though related, stem from the Latin “maleficium,” originally meaning any harmful deed often involving magic (Bailey 961). This damaging sorcery, later attributed to witches, was perceived as specific to women, posing societal and legal challenges (Bailey 961).

This situation is illustrated in mythology with Hecate and in the Old Testament with the Witch of Endor and Lilith (Jilg 37). In the fifteenth century, the term “maleficus” (or “malefica” for women) was used by Johannes Nider and church authorities to denote a witch, referring to one who performed harmful sorcery or “maleficium.” Witches were accused of using magic for crimes like theft, murder, causing diseases, ruining crops, and controlling weather, often believed to harness Satan’s power, deny Christ, and surrender their souls to him (Bailey 29).

The devil-witch connection in Christian witchcraft began with the Church’s fight against heretical groups in the ninth century (Akin 147; Ulgen 43). Witches were thought to engage in harmful acts for the devil, much like Eve’s temptation by the serpent (140-142). In a notable fourteenth-century case, Alice Kyteler and others were accused of witchcraft, marking the first instance of a woman being burned for witchcraft-related heresy (Russell 189; Cohn 198-204; Peters 223; Davidson and Ward 1; Williams 20-24).

The period between 1430 and 1780, known as the “Witch Hunt Era,” saw intense witch-hunts predominantly in Europe (Akin 243). During this time,

200,000 to 500,000 accused witches were executed, with over 85% being women (Ben-Yehuda 1). Medieval beliefs shaped perceptions of women as sources of misfortune, blaming them for natural disasters like earthquakes, famines, and diseases through alleged supernatural interactions. Women were often scapegoated during times of calamity (Ulgen 42; Aksan 365).

Throughout history, sacred texts often justified accusing women of witchcraft, especially in the Middle Ages. These were used to denounce or validate actions, historically enabling the persecution of women in the witchcraft realm. Often extracted from their original cultural and historical contexts, these texts have been employed to reinforce societal patriarchal structures by appealing to divine authority. Some of these are as follows:

Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion. (King James Version, Lev.18.23).

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. (King James Version, Mal.3.5).

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (King James Version, Gen.3.16).

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. (King James Version, Exo.22.18).

For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. (King James Version, Rev. 22.15).

The verses highlighted the link between magic, witchcraft, and evil deeds, with a focus on punishing them, rooted in the belief in the moral, physical, and mental inferiority of women. Women were seen as weaker in faith, more susceptible to demonic seduction, physically vulnerable to visions, and prone to spreading dark arts due to their loquacious nature (Bailey 51). Witchcraft's association with women stems from their historical role as practitioners, reinforced by heretical movements, especially in medieval Europe, where it was considered a

predominantly female crime, encompassing practices like “milk magic,” “weather magic,” and midwifery (Akın 114-128, 170).

Most accused witches were from the peasant class, often elderly women or those in solitude. Witchcraft thus perpetuated discrimination against women. In their relationship with nature and production, women with empirical knowledge were pushed into roles like healers and herbalists instead of fields like medicine and chemistry (Karaküçük 57; Campbell 57).

Witchcraft accusations persisted into the fifteenth century. Pope Innocent VIII issued a famous papal bull on witchcraft in December 1484, appointing Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger as Inquisitors. Two years later, they published the influential work *Malleus Maleficarum*, drawing extensively from biblical declarations and serving as a guide for prosecuting witches (Kramer and Sprenger 1-4). It became the primary reference during intense witchcraft fears (Guiley 223).

The witch hunts of the Middle Ages represent a harrowing chapter in history where women, primarily perceived as weak and scapegoats for all manner of societal ills, faced extreme cruelty and persecution. The echoes of this dark past serve as a potent reminder in modern narratives, cautioning against the dangers of superstition and the marginalisation of the “other.”

### **Witchcraft and sorcery in Southeast Asia**

In *Witches: Wise, Weak or Wicked Women*, Scott (136) examines the medieval period to understand women’s contemporary roles, emphasising Foucault’s “historicity of truth” as foundational (Brossat 48; Bennett 2015). This exploration informs modern engagement, investigating the meaning of witchcraft beyond established interpretations (Gaskill 1069). Despite limited coverage in Southeast Asian ethnographic literature and fewer accusations compared to Africa or Melanesia (Ellen 3), gendered witchcraft-related violence persists, evident in ongoing battles in Nigeria, Nepal, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and the Philippines (Dehm and Millbank 202). Thus, dissecting sorcery and witchcraft’s impact on the modern portrayal of women, especially in select Philippine fiction, remains crucial.

Before contact with other cultures, the pagan country of the Philippines embraced a bilateral kinship structure where women actively participated in economic activities (Arens 36; Bautista 144; Ong and Peletz 1). Virginity held minimal value, and adultery was of little significance (Brewer 2; Infante 61). Women notably dominated the spiritual sphere, forming the “priestly class” primarily consisting of elderly women known as “baylan,” “babaylan” or “catalonan,” overseeing rituals, ceremonies, and community well-being (Blair and

Robertson qtd. in Bautista 144; Arens 36; Bankoff 37), raising their position as esteemed and influential figures within the barangays. This cultural practice has supported mental health from pre-colonial times to the present day (Ladrado-Ignacio et al. 163). Antonio Pigafetta, the Vicentine knight, documented women's integral role in funerary rites, aligning with Southeast Asia's longstanding tradition of elevating women's status over centuries (Salonia 89; Andaya 99).

In subsequent years of colonial history, there is a trend of defeminisation, marked by women's decreased involvement in spirituality, medicine, and sexual autonomy (Fluckiger 1). The widespread use of Spanish-inspired folk magic, "hechicería," in Manila, as evidenced by 98 Inquisition cases, prompted a reassessment of colonial authority (Mawson 220). Similarly, Amina Mama highlights a pattern of violence against women, particularly in postcolonial Africa, linked to the legacy of colonial violence (qtd. in Gerrard and Sriprakash 4). Spanish authorities enforced traditional gender roles, relegating women to domestic spheres and men to public life (Camacho 62), supported by Catholic practices shifting from nature signs to God as the source of blessings (Arens 36). However, Christianity's symbols and codes failed to replace previous belief systems, resulting in a "hybrid cosmology" (Bankoff 37; Go 187-190).

Nick Joaquin's portrayal of women in *May Day Eve* established a foundation for a postcolonial understanding of women, linking them to colonialism and modernism, and justifying the association with witch as a response to counter defeminisation. Postcolonialism, as Simon During (qtd. in Hawley 770-771) noted in 1998, transitioned from anti-colonial critique to a reconciliatory approach, moving away from a focus on self-determination and autonomy. Joaquin's design can be traced to Malory's tactic of providing Morgan le Fay the means to act upon her own dilemmas in a male-dominated society. This points to the "overlap of love magic and sorcery" in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand, as reported by Golomb (qtd. in Ellen 7). Morgan instructed 30 women to spy on Sir Launcelot and bring him to her castle under false pretenses (Malory 219). She made a potion to make Alisander sleep for three days, bringing him to her abode for her own desires (272). Morgan, depicted as an "anomaly," possesses extensive knowledge, fully in control of demons that sustain her power, a phenomenon that draws learned individuals inclined towards secrecy or religion to witchcraft (C. Scott 40; Gardner 45).

In Philippine culture, "babaylan," "baylan," and "catalonan" represent healers, shamans, and community leaders (Ladrado-Ignacio et al. 163), akin to the Basque "sorguin," denoting wise women, priestesses, or sorceresses. In the 1400s and 1500s, Basques were labelled as pagans by priestly authors and as wizards by Arab historians. Spanish perspectives were heavily influenced by Neo-Platonism,

Moorish culture, and existing animistic customs (Hardwick and Kennedy 45-53). In the early 1600s, Basque and Spanish priests facing opposition to their evangelising efforts in the Philippines linked the term “babaylan” with the Spanish word for witch: “bruja.” Witches were perceived as aberrant and disruptive to societal harmony and progression (Demetrio 372). These linguistic changes reflect significant instances of theocratic manipulation and standardisation (Hardwick and Kennedy 54). Colonisation led to both territorial and intellectual domination, shaping social norms and controlling what ideas were considered valid (Legg 265). Accusations of witchcraft against Catherine de’ Medici illustrate how deviating from societal norms was met with intolerance, revealing the political dimensions intertwined with witchcraft (Robert-Nicoud 242; Sutherland 45).

Spain’s arrival in the Philippines during the waning Middle Ages coincided with limited exposure to the Renaissance and Reformation, which sustained the enduring influence of chivalry, a set of values cultivated by Europe’s military elite from the 12th to the 17th century (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Pigafetta’s accounts provide insights into the prevailing chivalric inclinations of the era, as he was a knight himself (Salonia 97). However, the coexistence of pagan views in the Philippines raises questions about the compatibility of chivalric conduct, rooted in Christian principles, with indigenous practices, highlighting the stark contrast between chivalry and sorcery.

Theories about sorcery vary, some considering it a method for afflicted individuals to manage their condition (Arens 41). In Geoffrey Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*, Morgan le Fay is portrayed as a healer and shapeshifter, curing King Arthur (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Alternatively, sorcery is seen as a cultural projection of conditions like neurosis or guilt (Ellen 19). In the Cebuano region, “barang” is a common form of sorcery, practiced by “barangan” and involving magical abilities to harm others (Arens 38; Lieban 50). Suspected practitioners faced grave threats, as seen in a reported incident from the Republic Daily, Cebu, in 1958, where a resident’s house was bombed due to accusations of practicing “barang” (Arens 38).

Sorcery often remains anonymous, with victims rarely identifying witches, who may take on various forms including animals, such as the dreaded “aswang” in Negros Oriental and Cebu City (Lieban 67-77). These creatures, amalgamating various mythical beings (Ramos 238; Pertierra 320-322), can transform into a “sigbin,” capable of causing sickness or delivering fatal bites. This theme of shape-shifting is echoed in literature, as seen in Tiempo’s *The Witch* and Malory’s (86) depiction of Morgan transforming into a stone to evade King Arthur.

Belief in witchcraft is widespread beyond the Philippines, influencing actions globally (Gardner 34). Magic serves as a strategic tool for resistance and survival, helping individuals maintain “mental integrity” in difficult situations (Milanowski qtd. in Ankarloo et al. 57) and comprehend the universe (Hale 3). The concept of magic within modernity carries Eurocentric associations (Abdullah 566) that exhibit marginalised voices opposing Western authoritarianism (Gerrard and Sriprakash 2). This suggests an ongoing trajectory in understanding postcolonial experiences related to witchcraft and sorcery.

Catherine de’ Medici’s career from medieval to Renaissance times embodies modernity, yet her achievements as queen regent and peacemaker are often overlooked due to misrepresentation (Sutherland 45). Despite efforts to modernize, society’s mythic thinking persists (Gabriel 1296). In Sempruch’s *Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature*, the witch archetype questions societal links between sexuality, race, and ethnicity (1). Regardless of identity, the witch endures as a compassionate figure manipulated by dominant powers (12), rooted in historical witch-hunts where the spiritual realm was as important as the material world (de Koeijer 16).

In this hybrid landscape, women play vital roles by asserting their agency through disenchantment and re-enchantment, blending pre-existing beliefs with post-colonial contexts. Prevailing scholarly perspectives on gender in Southeast Asia accentuates women’s equality, complementarity, and relatively independent roles compared to men (Ong and Peletz 1). Lacson (36) implicitly sides with this perspective by describing modern Filipinos – both men and women – as individuals who, since 1571, have continuously adapted, negotiated, resisted, or succumbed to the coercion of European colonisers.

In *Culture as History*, Joaquin (3-53) explores the genesis of Filipino culture, advocating for the embrace of its hybrid identity formed by “Westernization” and “Asianizing” influences. He sees this synthesis as emblematic of the Filipino essence, revealing the collective human experience. Despite criticism labelling him a “Hispanophile,” he defends the transformative impact of Spanish conquest in shaping Filipino identity by imposing new societal norms (T. Joaquin and Kismadi 90) and suppressing indigenous practices contrary to Spanish Christianity (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

The American conquest, following Spanish colonisation, introduced literacy to Filipinos through Anglo-American texts. Joaquin’s early exposure to medieval literature, notably *Don Quixote*, molded his critical perspective, inspiring his pen name – Quijano de Manila – where “-ote” can be exchanged with “-ano” (T. Joaquin and Kismadi 83, 90). He also pondered on American language and education’s impact on Filipino writers, delineating Anglo-American motifs



infused with medievalism in Filipino literature. The influence of European refugees, particularly those with a medieval orientation, further contributed to this trend.

Correspondingly, Tiempo in *The Witch* reveals a fascination with supernatural elements like “dagun” or sorcerer’s magic (Galdon 380). These gothic elements prove the Romantic era’s exploration of romance, a sub-genre of medieval literature. Revived in the eighteenth century, Romanticism factored in Anglo-American culture and later the colonised world. Writers like Joaquin and Tiempo were shaped by this medieval idealisation. Tiempo’s depiction of enchanted elements and archetypes prevalent in Eastern Visayas, such as fairies, snakes, and witches (Galdon 380; Arens 36), illuminates the somber realities of tropical existence, influenced by Spanish and American colonisers’ aversion to witchcraft and sorcery.

*May Day Eve* and *The Witch* lend support to Keck’s (449) statement: “Societies such as the Philippines with strong European and American ties have inherited from medieval history a curious triple conceptual legacy of virtue, savagery, and parody.” In particular, savagery speaks to inquisition, alienation, and the declining value of women’s agency. The interplay between medieval influences and colonial dynamics speaks volumes about the intricate process of Filipino cultural identity formation as it transitions into the postcolonial era.

### **Witchcraft in *May Day Eve* (1947) and *The Witch* (1970)**

The aftermath of the Second World War proved beneficial for many writers, including Nick Joaquin and Edilberto Tiempo, who crafted renowned works. Towards the end of the former’s narrative, Don Badoy poured his emotions to the young woman who exuded a vibrant presence in a mirror during a wild May Day eve. His memory of Agueda, who “surprised his heart in the instant of falling in love,” is shrouded by the “medieval” atmosphere of witchcraft thus:

looked out upon the medieval shadows of the foul street ... while the blind black houses muttered hush-hush, their tiled roofs looming like sinister chessboards against a wild sky murky with clouds, save where an evil old moon prowled about in a corner or where a murderous wind whirled. (*May Day Eve* 77-78)

His illustration of “medieval shadows,” “black houses,” “wild sky,” “evil old moon,” and “murderous wind” justifies the necessity of reconnecting the past era with the present. Framed through Badoy’s perspective, Joaquin’s approach highlights the relevance of this connection, resonating with the evolution of existence, particularly for women, across the medieval-to-modern timeline. This narrative explains the significance of history post-colonisation, aligning with

events during the Spanish conquest. Joaquin utilises the motif of witchcraft from that era to evoke the sentiments of people moving into a more liberal modern society, as:

for they were young bucks newly arrived from Europe... and they had waltzed and polka-ed and bragged and swaggered and flirted all night and where in no mood to sleep yet---no, caramba, not on this moist tropic eve! Not on this mystic May eve! (*May Day Eve* 66)

The “mystic May eve” echoes European influences on Filipino youth like Badoy, introducing what Abdullah (566) views as Eurocentric mysticism and witchcraft. Joaquin challenges the idea that witchcraft in Southeast Asia was limited to rural areas (Gardner 45), suggesting broader societal impact. This parallel extends to Morgan le Fay, a noblewoman who, like others, pursued necromancy despite her upbringing in a nunnery (C. Scott 38). Her interest in necromancy diverged from traditional convent teachings, aligning more with clerical pursuits (Kieckhefer 155). This narrative stresses the clash between conventional religious education and occult interests among noblewomen. Joaquin proceeds in his tale to profile such witch-oriented climate, as:

And it was May again, said the old Anastasia. It was the first day of May and witches were abroad in the night, she said---for it was a night of divination, and night of lovers, and those who cared might peer in a mirror and would there behold the face of whoever it was they were fated to marry. (*May Day Eve* 67)

Anastasia, the servant, introduced divination to young high society girls, drawing from a tradition promising potential relief (Gardner 45). Joaquin’s focus was not on whether Anastasia instilled fear or hope, but on cultivating the idea of the ritual dictating life’s trajectories. This technique allows his characters to assert themselves upon the reader (T. Joaquin and Kismadi 83). Similarly, Tiempo’s *The Witch* portrays community members sharing Anastasia’s sentiments about myths, with Minggay referred to as *avoké*, which translates to “witch.” This pejorative is circulated and is passed down to children and visitors in Libas:

Minggay was known as a witch even beyond Libas... her notoriety was wide.... What she had in the hut nobody seemed to know definitely.... Some of the bottles contained scorpions, centipedes, beetles, bumble bees, and other insects; others were filled with ash-colored powder and dark liquids. (Tiempo)

Tiempo and Joaquin perpetuate folk myths about witches in Luzon and Visayas. Tiempo’s fiction, reflective of Lieban’s findings, reveals Minggay as living away from everyone, aligning with Demetrio’s view of witches as “secluded” (372). Joaquin and Tiempo highlight the community’s mixed feelings of fear and

fascination towards these beings. Agueda's interest in divination demonstrates her desire to find a lifelong partner. Initially hesitant, she and the other girls become captivated by Anastasia's tale of encountering a future lover. This scenario necessitates evaluating their behavior, questioning: "Witches: Wise, Weak, or Wicked Women?" (Scott 136). Their agitation unwittingly embodies Scott's criteria as they attempt to see their future husband in the mirror. Their shared empathy reinforces a longing for a more predictable future, away from uncertain partnerships. In envisioning their prospects, they adopt characteristics associated with marriage even before it unfolds. Agueda's anxiety impelled Anastasia to provide further instructions, highlighting Joaquin's approach supported by Gardner (157) that intense emotions are necessary for the magic to be effective:

"You must take a candle," she instructed, "and go into a room that is dark and that has a mirror in it and you must be alone in the room. Go up to the mirror and close your eyes and say: Mirror, mirror, show to me him whose woman I will be. If all goes right, just above your left shoulder will appear the face of the man you will marry." A silence. Then: "And what if all does not go right?" asked Agueda. "Ah, then the Lord have mercy on you!" "Why?" "Because you may see---the Devil!" (*May Day Eve* 68)

Anastasia's mention of the "devil" hints at her view of marriage as akin to walking down the aisle and living with the "devil." Eventually proving Anastasia's sentiment, Agueda breaks down and finally expresses antagonism to her husband:

"Oh, how I detest you, you pompous young men! You go to Europe and you come back elegant lords and we poor girls are too tame to please you. We have no grace like the Parisiennes, we have no fire like the Sevillians, and we have no salt, no salt, no salt! Aie, how you weary me, how you bore me, you fastidious young men!" (*May Day Eve* 72)

In her conversation with her daughter, Agueda blames the devil for her suffering. This goes with Judith Butler's idea (qtd. in Gabriel 19) that identity is formed over time through repeated actions. This recurring narrative shapes Agueda's perception of reality. This could be interpreted as her accommodated version of existence layered with jealousy or resentment toward Badoy's insensitivity to her whom he referred to as a "harlot," the one whose physicality he so admired: "He remembered her bare shoulders... the mobile insolence of her neck, and her taut breasts steady in the fluid gown" (*May Day Eve* 73), the one he introduced to his grandson as: "A witch so horrible you may die of fright. And she will bewitch you, she will torture you, she will eat your heart and drink your blood" (76), and the one who bit his arm. This labelling supports Sempruch's (1) argument

regarding men's treatment of women, focusing on positionality rather than essentiality. Agueda holds Badoy accountable for merely scratching the surface of her identity. The expansions of the Arthurian legend in the 12th and 13th centuries indicate Morgan's animosity, stemming from her unrequited love for Sir Launcelot (Malory 236). The unfulfilled yearning for complete reciprocation by Morgan and Agueda, respectively, leads to unfortunate incidents. More significantly, Morgan cleverly portrays herself as a powerless victim by suggesting an association with a devil, using this idea to distance herself from any active role in planning her husband's murder (Malory 85).

Consequently, Agueda seeks her husband's support for inner strength but feels unsupported, hindering her pursuit of self-fulfillment. Fluckiger (1) noted the decline of feminine sexual autonomy due to Spanish colonisation. This loss fuels her determination; contesting her husband becomes her sole path to some fulfillment. Badoy cannot belie her accusations, having been invested in meetings with "conspirators... with the speeches and his patriot heart still exultant" apart from being very playful with other women (*May Day Eve* 74). It was Europe that predisposed him and his comrades with fervor for the motherland, leading him to prioritise reality over the bewitching spells of women, particularly instigated by the notion at the time. Joaquin, through Badoy's statement, reflects on the captivating allure of a woman associated with witchcraft:

"Horrible? God, no--- she was beautiful! She was the most beautiful creature I have ever seen! Her eyes were somewhat like yours but her hair was like black waters and her golden shoulders were bare... she was enchanting! But I should have known---I should have known even then---the dark and fatal creature she was!" (*May Day Eve* 76-77)

Despite her beauty and enchantment, there's a realisation of her darker, potentially dangerous nature. The use of irony lies in the contrast between the initial mesmerising appeal and the eventual recognition of her ominous qualities. Toward the end, Don Badoy's "grief" that "tore up his throat and eyes" were insufficient in expressing the depth of his regret for falling into the "trap of the May night" orchestrated by the "evil old moon," which cast those "terrible silver nets" advertising the "snare of summer" that made their relationship broken beyond repair (77-78).

Minggay's sense of isolation mirrors Anastasia's perception of partnership and Agueda's haunting experience with the "devil" in the mirror. Agueda both despised her husband and longed for genuine love from him whose pride hindered his expression of affection until her passing. Minggay found peace in solitude after her husband's demise, a respite from years of abuse: "He died a

long time ago, when my boy was eleven... I'm glad he died early. He was very cruel" (Tiempo).

The boy-narrator presents an unprecedented notion that serves as the root cause of Minggay's estrangement from society. The speculation surrounding her alleged involvement in his demise, logically construed to fit their narrative, fueled the town's ostracism, resulting not only in physical but also emotional isolation. Compounding this, Minggay's own son, who departed years ago due to her disapproval of his early marriage, would have bridged the emotional gap had he returned. Yet, there is no trace of his presence: "Many times I feel in my bones he is alive and will return before I pass away" (Tiempo).

The attribution of witch to Catherine de' Medici, based more on myths than on factual evidence as asserted by Sutherland (45), parallels Minggay's situation where people embraced hearsay over the genuine accounts she conveyed to the boy. At first, he found himself inclined to like the woman who aided him in catching shrimps, basing his preferences on what he had directly heard and observed. However, his curiosity piqued upon inquiring about her residence. She responded, "... across the balet," known as "Minggay's tree" where she was often seen seated on one of its numerous twisting vines that composed its grotesque trunk (Tiempo). This sparked numerous stories of her suspected vengeance, said to cause ailments like carbuncles or fevers, and supposedly using spells to afflict victims with insects. Another tale involved her praise or "buyag" on a baby boy, resulting in persistent skin eruptions (Lieban 74-75; Ellen 10).

Minggay's narrative centers on her resilience; despite witch-hunting incidents, she remains unharmed. The boy's reluctance to question the community's story reflects increased social exclusion. Although he doubts Minggay's identity as the alleged witch who was kind to him, he subtly acknowledges society's authority by returning most of the shrimps she helped him catch. Emotionally stricken, Minggay continued to fulfill her communal role with the boy. Similarly, Morgan showed kindness by rescuing a knight from drowning because of her love for her deceased cousin and lover, Accolon (Malory 86).

Minggay and Agueda embody remnants of a past era that romanticised witchcraft and sorcery, their impact stretching into the contemporary postcolonial era. Here, entrenched ideals of womanhood persist, often disregarding their needs and desires for defying norms. Characters like Badoy and the boy-narrator unravel the complexities of a woman's identity as the witch, both within the home and in society. They are catalysts of change, influencing

communities and promoting their historically elevated status in Southeast Asia (Andaya 99).

While sorcery and witchcraft were common in the medieval era, they had profound and often fatal implications for the lives of both women. Foucault calls this enduring scar “the liturgy of punishment” that marks the victim “by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy” (qtd. in Sempruch 22). Their struggles aim to foster a more accountable society. The “witch” symbolizes women’s historical oppression, connecting past and present tensions, and stands as a central emblem of women’s cultural identity and feminist mythology, contrasting with male-centered narratives (Sempruch 172; Kjellgren 1287). This is seen in the chance given to the boy-narrator to change the community’s perception of Minggay, encouraging her acceptance and reintegration. Additionally, Badoy’s observation of his passivity in his marriage signifies this shift.

In navigating societal hierarchies, Minggay skillfully shields her story from relentless witch-hunters, exemplifying a revolution against subjugation, where the perceived “bound” individual breaks free from society’s grasp, contrasting with collective suppression within the community. Badoy’s assessment of Agueda, as someone whose “broken body [is] set free at last from the brutal pranks of the earth” (*May Day Eve* 77), demonstrates recognition of his ongoing torment. This shows a longing for freedom that evades him, tethered to societal expectations surpassing his bond with his wife. Badoy’s ironic captivity within norms stresses Agueda’s feeling of “un/belonging,” revealing how postcolonial women may possess more freedom than men.

The witch as a feminist mythology clarifies the divergence between positionality and essentiality. As the essence is compromised by mythical (false) accusations, the anima (feminine persona) represents a reinterpretation of this oppressive tool (witch), influencing women’s roles within a highly complex relationship of historical symbolism, feminist ideologies, and gendered narratives across diverse cultural contexts and timeframes.

## Conclusion

The characterisation of women as witches in European medieval times has not only endured but also evolved, shaping contemporary female identities within postcolonial contexts. This phenomenon validates the enduring impact of colonisation on the “marginalised” or the “other.” Discussing the significant role of the medieval context in shaping modern perceptions of women in select Philippine fiction, this study initially delved into the widespread occurrence of witch-hunts and related violence, exploring the ongoing dialogue surrounding

women's marginalised status, rooted in the gendered culture of witch-hunting since medieval times.

The study highlighted how witch-hunts predominantly targeted women and analyzed the Eurocentric views that influenced societal discrimination against them. Through an investigation of historical stereotypes and literary characters, it deepens our understanding of Eurocentrism. This concept explains the "historicity of truth" and shows how the modern/postcolonial world uses the term "witch" as an oppressive tool to redefine a woman's role, rather than her true nature. This strategic positioning is concretised to mean her abilities to counter accusations, challenge circumstances of being branded as such and assert her right as a social agent amid imposed enchantments and disenchantments.

The reevaluation of women as autonomous entities in modern times is solidified by constantly reassessing their standards, enabling them to be active participants in society as globalised individuals, not confined to domestic roles. This understanding of the historical relationship between the European medieval era and its reverberations in the global south does not dismiss Eurocentrism but considers it a platform for adaptive behaviour within the metaphorical postcolonial context. With this, readers and scholars alike are invited to contemplate the historical biases that influence the ongoing pursuit of gender positioning, while considering the interaction between gender and power across time, encompassing not only a linguistic outlook but also cultural and societal dimensions.

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