



AROUND THE TABLE

WITH SIX 'WITCHES'

A conversation based on true events

Mieke Van Damme

What if I told you that in a village in Hainaut, six women were burned to death, branded as witches?

They were tortured and raped for days, and finally strangled and burned. Ah, you might think, that was all a long time ago, we've been through so many world fires already.

What if I say the names of those erased women, silenced by society? Today they are part of the statistics of three centuries of witch hunts with 100,000 victims in Europe alone. No one knows their names anymore.

What if I weave their history into timeless creations made of thread? Sweaters and cardigans that you make to strengthen the bond with our ancestors. Hats and scarves that you wear to keep yourself and the memory of the pyres warm. Threads that connect us to each other, to ourselves and to our shared history.

What if I give them back their voice and let them tell what happened? Life as it was in 'La Terre des Débats', the former Hainaut. This round table discussion is based on true events. Quintine and Agnesse, Martine and Catherine, Evette and Magdelaine really lived. They were burned on a hill in Ellezelles on 26 October 1610.

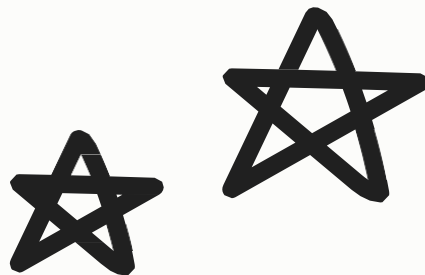
On a grey day we made a pot of tea and sat down together around the table. Outside it was raining cats and dogs. Inside a lively conversation with six chatterboxes developed.

Welcome ladies. How happy I am to finally receive you in my home. After all this time, more than 400 years... Come in Quintine, Evette, Catherine. And there are Martine and Agnesse too. There is still a spot here Magdelaine, sit down. I don't have to introduce you, do I? You know each other from the past. You lived in Ellezelles at the time of that horrible witch hunt that cost you your lives, and that of so many other innocent women and men. I would like to talk to you about that. But first a question: what do you think of Micca, my handicraft collection?

Quintine: I think it's really great and I'm so happy with my jacket. Red has always been my favorite color. And then those hearts... Oooh, they really suit me...

The pentagrams on it don't bother me, I understand why you did that. But I wasn't thinking about that at the time.

All those symbols, I had nothing to do with them. I was just a young woman, crazy about love, crazy about life.



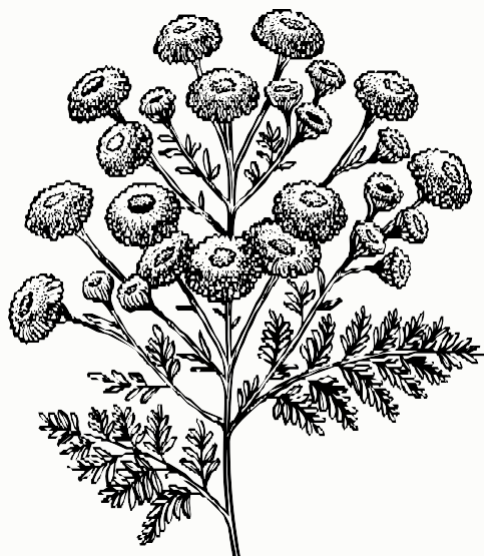
Evette: No, those pentagrams or runes don't mean anything to me either. My favorite is that mother's bag. A hip bag like that comes in handy when you go picking herbs in the forest.

I used to have one too, but it wasn't that nice.

Catherine: Isn't it all a bit too nice? We didn't have any clothes like that. We were poor and wore things made of undyed wool. That was cheaper. We had few clothes and we often had to mend them.

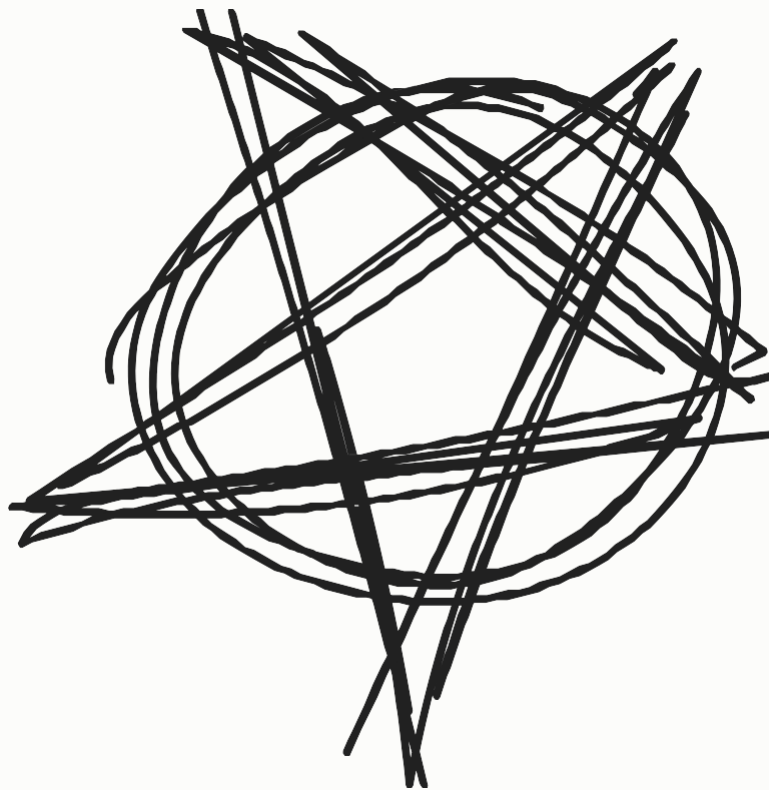
And also those colours in your collection... much too lively, too bright. With us you mainly saw grey or dark shades.

Martine: I have dyed wool with plants, usually I used tansy like the one you dyed your Moebius scarf with, Mieke. Nice idea by the way, that twist in your scarf. You could find tansy in abundance on the verges and along the fields. Did you know that this herb not only keeps insects away, but also witches? My husband Nicolas threw handfuls of it in the fireplace. But it didn't help much, hahaha.



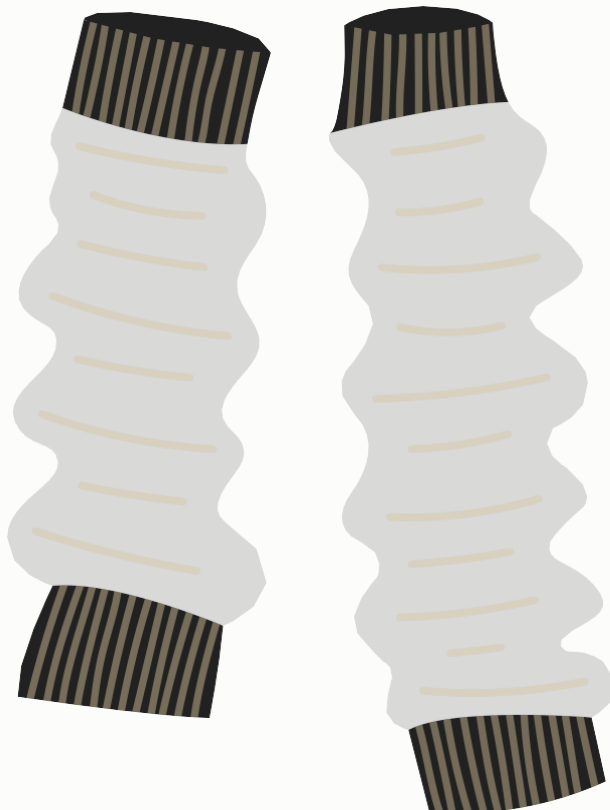
My designs are indeed not a copy of the clothing from your time. But I always looked for a link, for example through a symbol such as those pentagrams that are distorted by the heat of the fire.

Quintine: Ah, is that because of the fire? I thought it was because of the ravages of time, you know, after four centuries something sometimes becomes crooked and warped.



You can look at it that way too. But tell me, what did your clothes look like?

Magdelaine: Simple: a skirt, a bodice and a chemise. The skirt was long and wide, sometimes with an apron over it. The bodice was tight-fitting and sometimes had a collar or a hood. The chemise was an undergarment with long sleeves that came out from under the bodice. Sometimes we also wore a jacket, a kind of coat that was worn over the bodice. The jacket usually had a round neck and no collar. Poor women also wore a headdress to cover their hair. This could be a cap, a hood, a cloth or a hat. The headgear was often white or black. We also wore shoes, usually leather or wood. No stockings or socks, but sometimes legwarmers made of wool. So with those legwarmers in your collection you are definitely fine.



Evette: Yes, especially because they are nice and warm. That's what I like about all your designs. The wool keeps you nice and warm. For it was bitterly cold in our time, much colder than now. I still remember well the winter of 1607, it was the coldest in all history.

Catherine: Oh yes, I remember that too. The wine froze in the barrels. And the birds fell dead from the sky. There were extreme weather conditions everywhere. Snow in the summer, disastrous hailstorms, devastating storms, and rain, rain, rain...

Evette: Historians call that period the Little Ice Age. And that is no exaggeration. The worst of it all was that the Ice Age caused bad harvests and famine. We lived off the land, from harvest to harvest. But the grain would not ripen, the cattle had no winter food, the fruit rotted on the trees, there was no more bread on the table... And then there were those constant wars. Poor or rich, life was hard for everyone, and even harder for the poor people. No, we did not have it easy then. We were used to hunger and epidemics, but at the end of the 16th century life became really precarious. People saw it as a divine punishment. They felt abandoned and sought an answer from charlatans, sorcerers and occult figures. Even monarchs asked magicians and witches for advice. At the same time, these marginal figures aroused the hatred of the church. And that was the ideal soil for the mass hysteria that the witch hunts eventually were.

Agnesse: Yes, yes, yes... where has the time gone... But to return to our clothes: Catherine has a point. It wasn't as beautiful as your designs, Mieke. It had to be warm above all. And also practical and neat. We didn't follow the fashion of the rich women, which was much more luxurious and changeable. Still, we tried to present ourselves neatly and modestly. That was what was expected of us by the church and society.

Quintine: Pfffft, church and society ... they can go to hell with their expectations. Bunch of hypocritical bastards. They themselves were not at all neat and modest, you know. You should know what they did to me when I was in prison. They couldn't keep their hands to themselves, the bastards. One was worse than the other.

Catherine: Yes, Quintine, you shouldn't have been fluttering around the village like that. All the men were in love with you, such a voluptuous young woman who lived in a hut on the edge of the forest. You were making their heads spin, what do you want?!

Quintine: What do I want? Well, that they leave me alone. I loved life, nature, the animals in the forest and the sun on my bare skin. I didn't hurt a fly. I was so young, I wasn't a witch at all.



Evette: I wasn't a witch either, and I don't think anyone around this table calls themselves a witch. The term 'witch' wasn't used in our time, by the way. People talked about 'witchesses' who bewitched people, animals and crops on behalf of the devil. A failed harvest, a cow that stopped giving milk, a child that got sick... Someone had to pay for that. They looked for a scapegoat for everything that went wrong.

The witch trials started in the 13th century.

You were strangled and burned in 1610, a full four centuries later. So not in the darkness of the Middle Ages, but at the height of the Renaissance. Did so much go wrong all those years?

Martine: It wasn't always about sick children or cows, of course. That was often just a fallacy. And mind you, it wasn't always as bad as it is here. In the beginning, people usually got a fine or were chased out of the village. The idea of a devilish sect only came in the late Middle Ages and from then on, people cracked down hard. Not by chance when everyone was poor and hungry. Everywhere in Europe, the pyres were lit. For a hundred years, the fire didn't go out for a single day.

Magdelaine: I think the cause was the church and the monarchy who wanted to strengthen their power. They had conceived the plan to purge the masses of heretics and sorcerers. They saw us as a dangerous sect with devilish tricks. We were living at the wrong time, in the wrong place ... in the middle of the fight against the heretics.

Everything that was liberal had to go. It was the fault of those devilish Protestants. Without them, none of this would have happened. But I had nothing to do with Protestantism. I was a pious, Catholic woman.

Evette: Of course, it's easy to talk afterwards, but you're pretending there was a master plan, Magdelaine, some kind of conspiracy. There wasn't, there was no conspiracy.

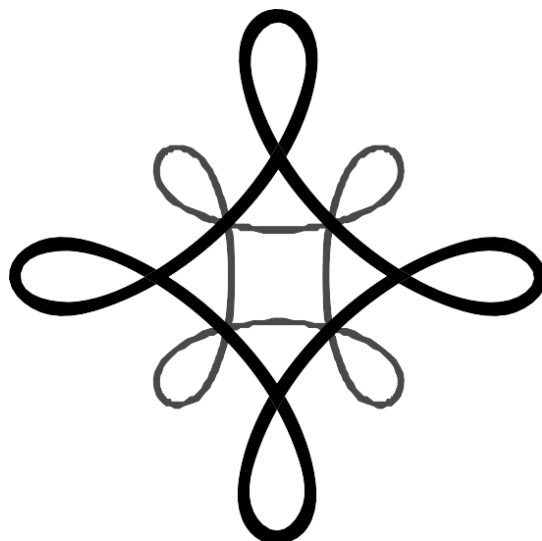
Dutch historian Steije Hofhuis talks about 'a design without a designer'. He refers to Darwin. Just as biological organisms, he argues, ideas come in many variations, and the one that is best adapted to its environment wins. He compares it to how viruses work.

Catherine: Interesting, and revolutionary too. I can imagine that even today a lot of people would disagree with this. In any case, that virus was very contagious. It conquered the whole world.

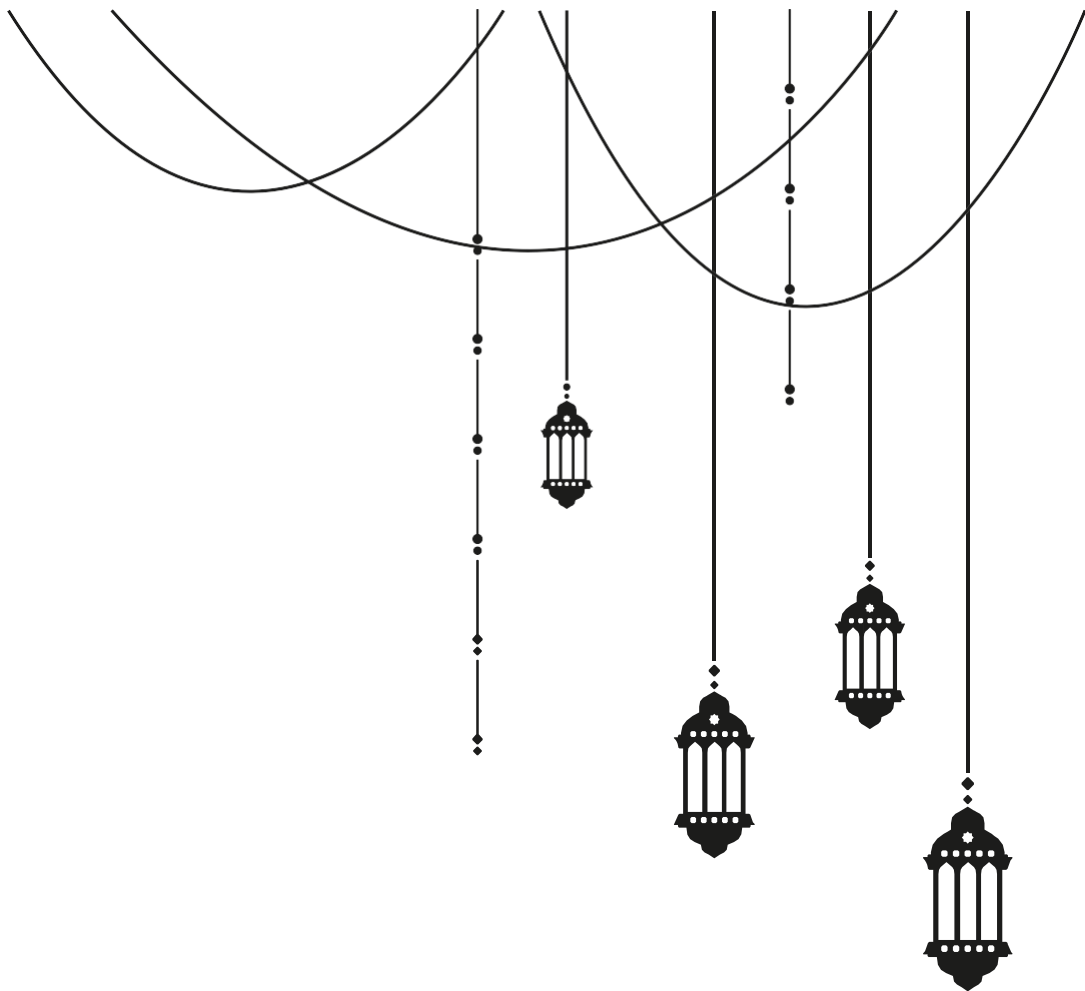
Evette: Was it a virus, was it a conspiracy... I don't know. But even if there were plans for the witch hunt, from the church or the monarchy, we had no insight into that. Our mental horizon barely exceeded our own village. And there everyone was afraid. We thought the world was ending, the end times had come...

It was only later, after my death, that I became interested in the course of history. Now it is clear that the witch hunt also had to do with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Our society was really disrupted by climate change. You can still learn something from that with the current global warming. But in our case it was about a cooling, with years of crop failures and famine. I would like to come back to it because that really had dramatic consequences for our feudal society. That system had been stable for centuries, but disappeared in just one generation. The farmers revolted. People looked for other incomes to survive, for other systems.

Martine: Many professions were suddenly forbidden for women. We weren't even allowed to study anymore. Women belonged at home by the hearth, the family as the cornerstone of society, you know.



Evette: Indeed, that's how it was. And unfortunately women were also the ideal scapegoat. Just think about it: the regions with the greatest misery also had the greatest witch hunts. Misery and superstition always go together. How have we not been ourselves. We also walked in processions to pray for rain or for the rain to stop. We tried to calm nature with holy water, but to no avail.



Quintine: You're taking it all too far, Evette. Capitalism, feudalism, climate change... All those big words. It was just pure misogyny. Respect for women had turned into fear, hatred and oppression. That downward spiral had been going on for a long time. Eve was blamed for everything. But we weren't heretics. We were pregnant women, raped by the lord of the castle. Fishwives who didn't mince their words. Neighbors who wouldn't let a jealous farmer box them in. Former mistresses who had to be gotten rid of. Women who stood on their own two feet, had their own opinions, women like me.



Agnesse: Yes, Eva was blamed for everything, that's true. They made us afraid of each other, literally and figuratively terrified. We didn't dare do anything anymore, we didn't dare say anything anymore. We walked through the village with our heads bowed. Afraid of the gossip and jealousy. Afraid of what so-called witnesses could say because they were afraid themselves. Afraid of false accusations that were forced during torture. We passed that fear on for generations, from mother to daughter.

Catherine: There were men among the victims, weren't there?

I read that in Hainaut between 1580 and 1630 there were no less than 200 trials, in 50 years. Half were sentenced to death. 80 percent of the victims were women, most of them poor and old.



Magdelaine: They targeted us women. They thought women were more sinful than men and were more easily tempted by carnal desires, even with the devil. Those male victims were usually related to the witch. And yes, we were poor and old, that's true. But everyone over 50 was old in those days, you know. Quintine was younger, she was our brat, our mama's girl, hahaha.

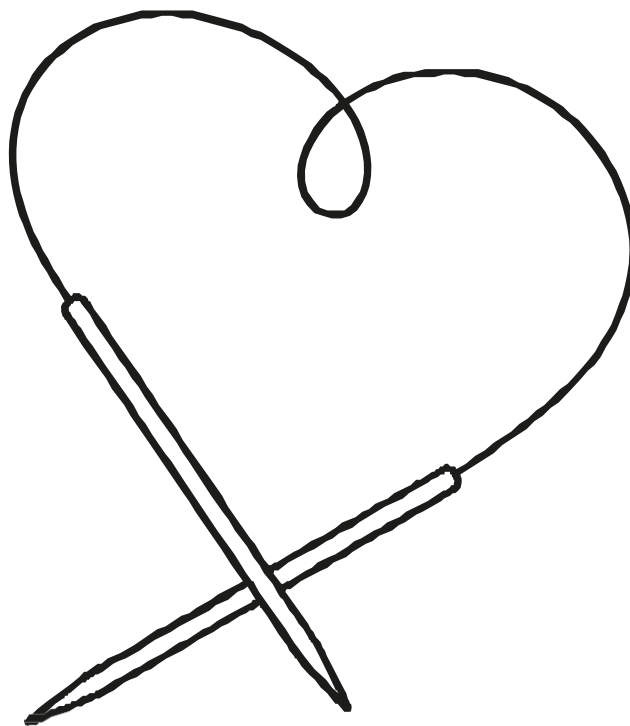
Quintine: Yeah, laugh. I had to manage on my own without my mother and father, without my husband. And that all went well, until that damned bailiff tried to put his fingers on me.

Magdelaine: It's true girl, you did well. You didn't have to survive on handouts, like many women at that time. They were a dream scapegoat and the archetype of a bad woman. There were also well-off women who were accused. But they could usually buy off a witch trial, and that money was a nice bonus for those gentlemen in power. Sometimes it didn't work, like with Elisabeth Vlamyncx from Ghent. She came from a good family and was also married to an alderman of Ninove. It must have been in 1595, I believe, somewhere in December. They burned her in front of the Gravensteen. Poor woman.

Evette: I remember that. Didn't she have a daughter who was also accused?

Magdelaine: Nelleken, yes. That child got away with a fright. She was acquitted.

I dedicated one of my designs to Nelleken. It is a jacket in ajour - à jour literally means: to the day, visible, openwork. The truth that comes to light. That is just a little easier in Ghent than in other cities. Many municipal governments are afraid to tell the truth.



Quintine: It is also not something to be proud of, burning women and children. I heard the story of a woman who was pregnant when she was accused. She first gave birth in prison. And then it was off to the stake. That was also in Ghent ...

Martha was her name. I knitted her a baby blanket with bindrunes for courage, love and strength.



Magdelaine: There were also children of accused women who themselves claimed that they were bewitched. I think they did that to be with their mother in prison, oh gee. Sometimes their imagination went wild and they started accusing other people.

I still don't understand how such a collective hysteria could arise. You all look like sensible women.

Evette: Well yeah, maybe we seem smarter now.

We have been living in another dimension for over 400 years. But at that time we didn't know much better. In hindsight it is always easy to talk. We were ordinary village women who did not look further than the hills of Le Pays des Collines. By the way, it was not called that here at that time. Ellezelles was part of La Terre des Débats, together with Lessines, Bois-de-Lessines, Flobecq, Ogy, Papignies and Wodecq. The people here spoke Picard, like almost everyone in Hainaut at that time. But our region was a disputed area between Flanders and Hainaut for a long time. All that tug-of-war about who was actually the boss, that was unimaginable. That is why they called it La Terre des Débats, or Debate Land. And mind you, that game started in the 13th century and lasted until the 18th century. It wasn't until 1737 that we finally belonged to Hainaut, but by then we were long dead and buried. Anyway, I only found out about all that afterwards. At that time we were just superstitious old women.

Quintine: Say Evette, speak for yourself, okay? I wasn't superstitious at all and certainly not an old lady.

Catherine: Still, still, I think Evette is right. All those changes, all that uncertainty, all those attacks on the Catholic Church... People didn't know what to believe anymore. And they just believed in everything. Also in witchcraft, sorcery, the devil, ...

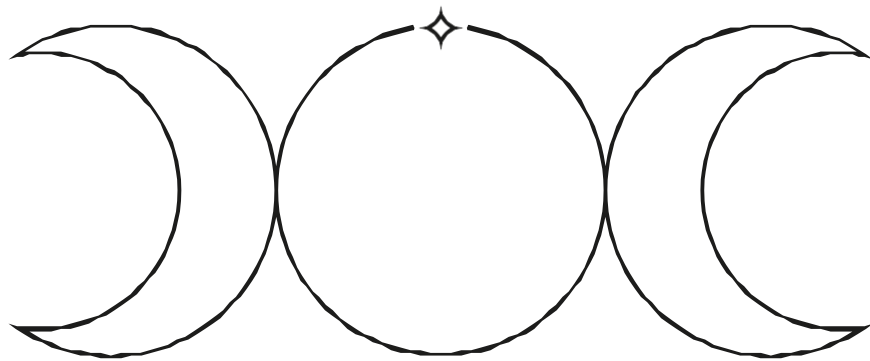
Evette: And then you had those terrible Spaniards with their religious war. Death and horror were everywhere, the Spanish Inquisition was running at full speed. Only the Catholic Church had the truth at that time. Anyone who thought differently was a heretic and had to be destroyed. Violence was normal and part of our lives. The people were prey, there was famine everywhere. We lived on roots, leaves and beets without salt.

Magdelaine: But you mustn't forget Evette that in the medical world of our time there was no place for women anymore. The men were afraid of us. Because we were midwives, healers, herbalists... The first victims of the witch hunt were actually midwives. They could influence the child from birth. And if the child died, it was of course their fault. But those wise or wise women passed on their knowledge about birth control, abortion, sterilization, etc. For a long time they were indispensable to ordinary people. Until the moment that the first male doctors graduated from the universities. We women knew too much, we were a threat to those men. So they came up with the horror of the witch to silence us women. God, the king and your husband: that was the Holy Trinity at the time, hahahaha.

Agnesse: Be quiet Magdelaine, you can't say something like that. That is heresy.

Magdelaine: Oh Agnesse, they can't burn us at the stake now. And I'm right, aren't I?! They were the boss. The pastor, the local ruler and the husband. And woe betide you if you were disobedient. Then you would end up before the bailiff's court.

Quintine: And woe betide your bones if you didn't let that bailiff do his loose hands. Then you would end up on the stake.



How could that bailiff get his way like that? You lived in a constitutional state, with courts, witnesses and interrogations? No one could just take the law into their own hands? You had to appear before L'Office du bailliage des Terres de Flobecq et de Lessines. And if they were not sure of their verdict, they would bring the case before the court in Mechelen, Ghent or Tournai. This is recorded in detail in reports that are still kept today in the state archives of Brussels and Mons.

Catherine: Sure, sure. After the accusation, there was always an investigation. They questioned witnesses and collected evidence. They shaved my whole body looking for marks of the devil - a strange birthmark or a dark spot in a hidden place was suspicious. They put a hood over my head and then they stuck needles in my body.

Evette: And be careful if you had herbs in the house. They were my undoing.



Magdelaine: That was also the case with that rich woman from Ghent, that Elisabeth. They had found magic powders with her: sage mixed with butter and some beer to heal a leg wound. That was proof enough in those days. But there always had to be a confession, that's why there was so much torture. During my captivity they put me right next to the fire, completely naked. And I was not allowed to fall asleep. It took days... I don't remember how long. The executioner woke me up every time I fell asleep...

Evette: People believed that real witches were weightless. They were made of air, which is why they could fly on a broom. So they built a special scale: the witches' scale. Women were weighed on it and ... found to be too light. Because people were fiddling with the weights. Or they put extra lead plates in a slide under one side of the scale. That whole weighing was just a play to falsely accuse someone. There was also the water test, where you were tied hand and foot and thrown into the water. If you floated, you were a witch. Because a witch is lighter than water. If you sank, you drowned. So it always ended badly.

Agnesse: They used thumbscrews and Spanish boots on me. They slowly crushed my legs with them. They tightened the screws and hammered in wedges. Then they hung me by my hands that were tied behind my back. In the end I confessed that I had committed fornication with the devil. I am still not well from it.

Quintine: Poor Agnesse, what have they done to us, huh? But don't let it bother you, boy. We have all made false confessions. And if we hadn't confessed, they would have killed us anyway. Because you can only survive such severe tortures with the help of the devil, they thought then. Admit it, they were quite resourceful, our executioners. All those ways to torture us... Where did they get their sick inspiration?

Martine: There was a book, the hammer of witches, one of the most notorious and shameful works ever to see the light of day. It described how witches could be tortured during interrogation. In short, it came down to the fact that everything was allowed, even techniques that were not allowed in a normal trial. And of course all those poor women confessed to the craziest things. Intercourse with Satan, going to the Sabbath on a broom, making stews from human flesh, kissing the devil's bare behind, sacrificing babies... They confessed to all those deadly sins under duress.

The hammer of witches, I know that book. I got a copy from the library.

Martine: Whaaat??!! Is that book still being used?

No, no, don't worry. That book is only historically important. Perhaps an impertinent question, but could you read and write?

Martine: I don't. None of us, I think. We didn't have time to go to school. There wasn't even a school.

Evette: My husband Jean could read a little, God rest his soul, he read from the Bible. He had gone to catechism and had learned it from the priest.

Magdelaine: Have you read that hammer of witches, Martine?

Martine: After my death, yes. Out of curiosity. And really, I couldn't believe my eyes. The things they write about women in there. You have to be really crazy to read that. That book came from Germany and was an immediate bestseller. And when the Pope declared war on witches, all hell broke loose.

Quintine: My executioner must have read that book too. He wanted to know what the devil looked like who crawled into my bed. Confess, he shouted, was it a dog, a goat or a rat? He also shaved my pubic hair in search of a devil's mark. The bailiff stood there watching. Then they raped me in turn. I still remember the hard stone floor, the cold nights, my torn clothes. If only I had one of your sweaters then. Or that vest for Martine, with the runes on it. Even if they hadn't been able to protect me from those horrible men, I would have been a little warmer in the dungeon.

The bind runes symbolize love, courage and strength. I deliberately chose three runes and displayed them three times to make the magic work, just like in the baby blanket.



Martine: What kind of wool did you use for that vest, is it from a sheep?

Yes, this is Léttlopi from Iceland. Icelandic sheep live in a cold climate. As a result, their wool has unique properties. It is lighter, but also somewhat stiffer than most other types of wool. The wool breathes well and is water-repellent, so very suitable for warm vests.

Martine: Home-spun?

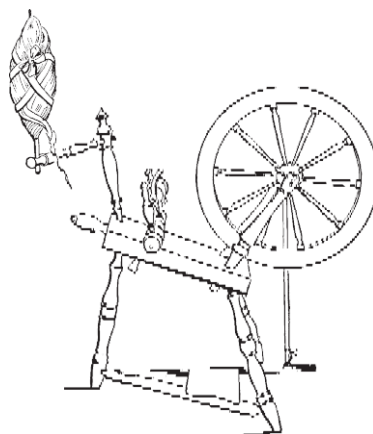
No, not this one. Nowadays there is a wide range of spun wool on the market.

Catherine: We didn't have that in our market in the past. We spun our wool ourselves, with the spindle.

I also like to spin, it has something calming. Spinning is often connected to 'fate' because life is seen as a thread, which can also break.

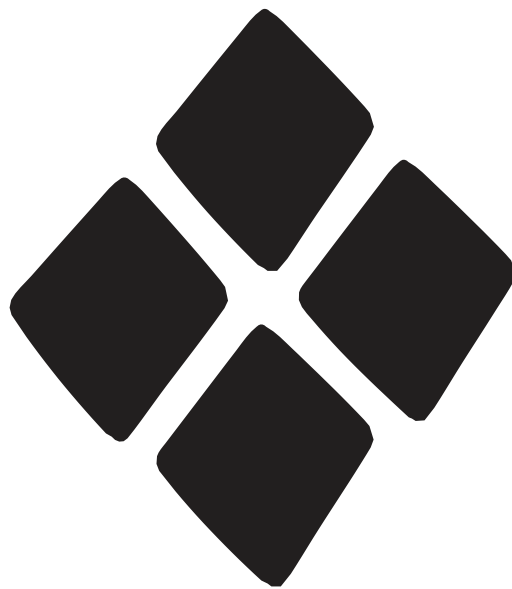
Quintine: You say, a thread that can break.
Very appropriate for us.

Evette: Yet I also think the thread is a positive image.
I see the common thread in your jacket, Quintine. We women are the common thread in the history of mankind.
And from a thread you make a chain that connects us across all generations.



Agnesse: Your collection is really full of symbolism, isn't it? Do those checks on my sweater have a meaning too?

Yes, the diamond was also a fertility sign and a protective symbol in the past. Coats of arms of unmarried women in the Middle Ages were always set in a diamond shape. Diamonds were seen as the union of heaven and earth from which the sun is born. Or as the womb from which new young life comes. The diamond has a pagan origin, but later diamond shapes were 'Christianized' and refer to the veneration of Mary. Mary is also a fertility symbol and the ideal point of contact for protection.



Agnesse: Interesting. I didn't know all that. I do know the Scottish checks of the kilts. But only from hearsay. I have never seen a Scot in my life. I do recognize that lacing. We often pulled cords through our clothes to hold everything in place. And the model also reminds me of the clothes we wore, with that tight-fitting waist and the cap sleeves. Yes, I would still like to wear something like that. Only the thread seems rather fragile to me. It won't last four centuries.

Hahaha, I don't think so either. Rowan's Felted Tweed is indeed not a super strong thread. You'd be better off going for Icelandic Léttlopi, or the Holst Supersoft from Quintine's jacket. They still contain spinning oil that you have to wash out after knitting.

Martine: Spin oil bijgot, what do you need that for? We spun the wool as it came from the sheep. All fat that made your hands wonderfully soft. We did remove the straw and dung from it. But that smell, I will never forget. It still hangs a bit in your Moebius scarf, although the smell of the tansy dominates it. It reminds me of the past, of my husband Nicolas. It makes me a bit melancholy ...

Shall we take a break to stretch our legs and make a new pot of tea? Too bad it's still raining. I would have liked to show you my herb garden.

- Ten minutes later -

Agnesse: I am really impressed by your bathroom, what a luxury ... a toilet inside the house. And running water, we could only dream of that!

Martine: Yeah, I'm totally refreshed. And I saw that you hung up a witches ball?

A witches ball??

Martine: That big red ball on the front door, isn't that a witches' ball? I used to have one too, a beautiful glass one as a deterrent against witches. In that mirrored ball the witch would be so startled by her own reflection that she would immediately fly away, at least that was the idea, hahaha.

Evette: I saw that hanging too when I went outside. I went to peep at your herb garden, despite the rain. How peacefully you live here between the hills. Le pays des collines, they have found a fitting name for our region, I think.

Did you see that straw doll, several meters high, on the next hill, that doll without a head? That was where your funeral pyre stood. I'm only saying that because you didn't experience that, right? Many women were burned alive. But apparently the judge was kind to you and had you strangled first.

Quintine: Come on, the gentleman was in a good mood, we can still count ourselves lucky.

Magdelaine: As if it wasn't bad enough...

Evette: The judge had nothing to do with it. It's because we also converted after the confession. That way we could still free our souls from the devil and go to heaven, the priest said. Women who did not convert ended up on the stake alive to burn the evil works of the witch. Hanging was not enough, because then her witchcraft could be passed on to her children.

Martine: That hill with the headless doll, that's the Place de l'Aulnoit, right? Yes, that's where we were taken, right after the verdict. They questioned us one last time to get new and important revelations - we were at death's door and had nothing left to lose. Then they strangled us with a rope before throwing us on the stake. Our body was then buried in a pit.

I walk the dog every day and then I look at your hill from my hill... That's how Micca was born.

Martine: I was going to ask you that. How did you come up with the idea of making something about witches? Aren't we a thing of the past?

The history of the witch hunt has always intrigued me. When I came to live here in Ellezelles, I went looking for your stories.

Magdelaine: We are fellow villagers, that's a nice feeling.

Yes, we are villagers. That is why I wanted to get to know you. There is a lot going on here in Ellezelles around witches and magic, with an annual sabbath and all kinds of parties. There is even a beer called Quintine. But little or nothing is known about your life and death.

Quintine: They have long forgotten us...

I find that so bad too. I wanted to change that. Not with yet another book about the witch hunt. I was looking for something with which I could literally and figuratively restore the thread between the past and the present. And something that has to do with love. Knitting is an act of love, I always say. All those hours of work to make something for someone you love. Your father or mother, your children or your partner. That energy continues to live. That way Micca can ensure that you will live on in memory forever.



Quintine: Ooooh, so sweet of you. And I think it's really clever. But do you think it will be successful? Is the witch hunt still alive among people?

More and more recently. Some cities want to restore the victims of that time to their honour. In Ghent, a memorial stone was placed at Prinsenhof. Nieuwpoort, Diksmuide and Lier also came with a pardon. Other municipalities are desperately holding on to the image of the evil witch for the sake of tourism. In Tournai, residents started a petition in 2014 for the rehabilitation of Marguerite Tiste. She was strangled and burned on 27 June 1671, at the age of just 23. The city decided to reject the request for rehabilitation. Ah, I can get so worked up about that.

Evette: Yes, I notice, Mieke, calm down. Are witches actually still being prosecuted these days?

Not in Europe. On 23 October 1684, Martha van Wetteren was burned at the stake in Belsele, East Flanders. She was one of the last victims in the Low Countries. Eventually, it was realised that burning witches had no effect on the poor harvest or the frozen rivers.

Evette: In Sweden you had one last big flare-up, forgive me the word. The fires were burning all over the country. It was a real massacre. The victims were beheaded at the foot of the pyre – otherwise their blood would extinguish the flames. 300 people died in the fire. That was around 1670.

Catherine: The Salem witch trials date from that time, don't they?

Martine: Oh yes, the witches of Salem, with Tituba, the black witch. What a story! That was in America, at the end of the 17th century. They even hanged two dogs then. Poor animals ...

Catherine: And poor people. Everyone accused everyone. The prisons were overcrowded. 17 people did not make it to their trial and died during their imprisonment. 19 victims were hanged, the youngest was 5 years old. Only when the governor's wife was also accused did the witch craze come to an end.

Quintine: Typical...

Catherine: After a year, a general pardon was granted and the last defendants were released from prison, including Tituba. The poor woman had to pay a lot of money for her year in prison and for her chains and shackles.

Quintine: How is it possible, paying for room and board?!

Catherine: Scandalous, huh? And of course she didn't have the money. Apparently a weaver from Boston was interested and bought her. But I heard that from hearsay.

Witch trials were also an expensive affair in our country. All expenses were meticulously recorded in the national archives. It was the witch or the family who paid for it. Often all property was confiscated. And after the execution the whole gang went to eat at your expense. You even had to pay for the wood for your funeral pyre!

Evette: Oh shut up Mieke, I can't take it anymore. It's good that it's all behind us now!

But outside Europe people are still accused of witchcraft. They are usually children, witches' children. In Congo, things are very bad. Children are forced to live on the streets and often even murdered. Just like in your country, they serve as scapegoats for illnesses and misfortunes.

Evette: For God's sake, haven't they learned anything from the past?

Quintine: I don't think much has changed in four centuries. The fear, the conspiracy thinking, the search for a scapegoat, the role of women, the lack of respect, the polarization ... it's all still there ... Today the whole world is Terre des Débats ...

Magdelaine: And then you forget about climate change!

Catherine: My child, another chance that we don't have to experience that again... sigh...

Agnesse: Don't be so pessimistic, ladies. We have managed to adapt to the new living environment. You can look at it that way, right? Humanity has survived. And even the witches survived. They call themselves wiccans now, I've heard. Our story, long forgotten, is being claimed today by a new generation of women – the daughters who escaped the fire...

Martine: Wow, who would have thought.

Agnesse: In Romania they are even building a witches' school. The woman behind the initiative is called Mihaela Minca – she calls herself the most powerful witch in Europe. She says that with the witches' school she can help women from the Roma community to escape poverty. Thousands of witches are active in Romania. About half of the population believes in witchcraft. But politics and the church are opposing the arrival of the school.

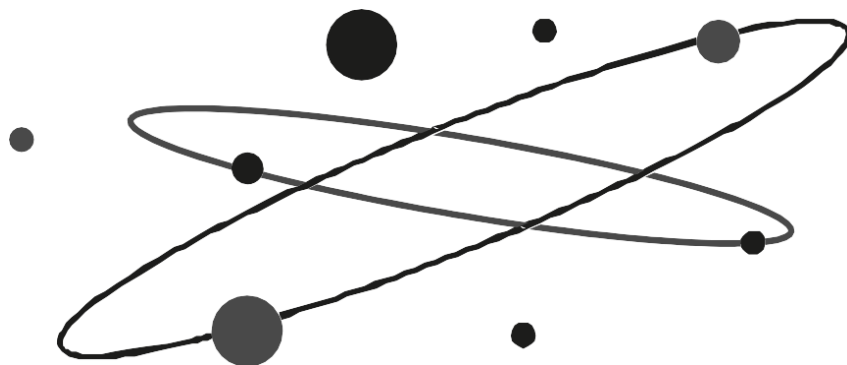
Magdelaine: Really unbelievable, history repeats itself. And are you such a new witch, Mieke, such a wiccan?

*No, I'm not. But it does intrigue me. In the middle of the last century, there was a renewed interest in witchcraft, especially through the book *Witchcraft Today*, by Gerald Gardner. In it he describes the history and rituals of nature magic. So it is more of a nature religion and that was given the name Wicca.*

Agnesse: Ahaaa, I now understand. Wicca, Mieke, Micca!!

Maybe it would be a good idea to invite a Wiccan for a second roundtable? I'll make some new designs by then. I'm experimenting with vegetable dyeing and weaving on a triangle loom.

Quintine: Yes, super cool idea. We can always free ourselves, ladies. So just let us know when the time comes, and we will fly over. We won't say how, hahahaha ...



Colofon

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