

# The Devil's Library Episode 13 – “The Wax Child”

[Intro Music]

Leraje

Welcome to another slightly belated edition of the Devil's Library. This time I have with me Pike.

Pike

Hail Satan.

Leraje

Ligeia.

Ligeia

Burn the witch.

Leraje

And um, Lithos.

Lithos

Uh, Hail Satan.

Leraje

And um, as you might tell from Ligeia's, Burn the witch comment. This time we're reading the Wax Child by Olga Ravn. The Wax Child is literally that a small child figurine made from wax by Christenze Krukof. Now, small note here, if I pronounce any of these names wrong or you guys think that I'm saying them wrong,

Ligeia

we will burn you.

Leraje

Burn me alive on a ladder or something.

Lithos

I don't think any of us speak Danish.

Leraje

No, we're just going to have to have our best guess. Yeah. Christenze is a 17th century Danish noblewoman. When we first meet her, she lives alongside Anne Bille. Anne has had numerous miscarriages and a few full term births which inevitably end with the baby dying shortly after birth. Anne ends up accusing Christenze of witchcraft and Christenze flees to Aalborg, which is in northern Jutland, where she meets and befriends some of the local women.

Maren, Elisabeth, who is married to Pastor Kyne Dorte, Apolene. Not sure. When Elisabeth is repeatedly abused by her husband. The women attempt to rescue Elisabeth and soon the accusations of witchcraft are flying about Christenze's again. The Wax Child itself is a sentient literary device, flitting from person to person and recounting christened Storey to us, the modern reader.

And the events of this novel are a fictionalisation of real events.

Ligeia

I think you said enough, so goodbye.

Pike

And if any. Any listeners haven't read the book yet, well, they have now.

Leraje

Yeah, you now have. Yes, yes, we always do. Spoilers.

Lithos

Yeah, well, yes, spoilers. Lots of women get executed.

Leraje

Okay, who would like to start?

Ligeia

Well, who suggested this book and why?

Leraje

Oh, I did.

Ligeia

I know, yeah.

Leraje

But I've already talked quite a lot.

Ligeia

Did you know why or you just.

Leraje

It was recommended to me and um, the person who recommended it to me has usually got very good taste. We've usually got very similar reading tastes. So uh, I looked at it and thought, ooh, that looks interesting. And then I saw that it was quite short and so I thought it would be a good one for us to do.

Ligeia

It is actually 183 pages. That's what I was checking now. So it's tiny. Yeah, yeah, that's true.

Lithos

It's short. But it's not a quick read.

Ligeia

No, not, not. It wasn't for me. It wasn't a quick read. No.

Pike

Am I. Right in assuming that we all got excited when we realised we're reading a witch book.

Ligeia

Yes.

Lithos

Yeah.

Pike

Why, why do we love witch books?

Ligeia

Because uh, we are witches. No.

Leraje

Satanic witches.

Ligeia

I, I mean I don't mind even that attribute because I think it's like just being rebellious and misunderstood most of the time and searching um, knowledge and being not conforming, confirming and not willing to be submissive probably. And sometimes it's just like, I don't know, having a birthmark is enough. I don't know.

Pike

All of that um, sounds perfectly satanic

Ligeia

to me, I must say. Yeah. You know like.

Leraje

Yeah, I think that's why it spoke to me. The witchcraft element of it is kind of like all the things that happen to these women are you know, kind of like the result of male Christian, um, fundamentalist, uh, fashy type people who are the kind of people that we kind of like stand against.

Anyway. So uh, there was, there was a kind of fellow. You know, I'm not going to, I'm not going to sit here and suggest we go through the same as they went through but um, there's certainly a fellow feeling there, I think.

Pike

Yeah. I think it's quite hard to write about witches because it's been done a lot and often very badly. Yeah. And not even, not even necessarily always badly. But it's, it's a very feminist topic and it's, it's very clear what you are going to say about it. That's what I quite liked about this book.

It doesn't take um, modern feminists and then make her this Danish witch in 17th century. They are these women set in that time.

Leraje

Mhm.

Pike

They do feel like real characters and even their witchcraft is a bit questionable. Is there actually witchcraft? Did you read it as it being actual magic?

Ligeia

It was ambiguous to me.

Lithos

I didn't think it was.

Pike

You didn't?

Lithos

No. Sorry, what were you going to say, Leraje?

Leraje

I was going to say I read it as witchcraft in the same way as I read Christians praying. You know it's just, it's just a ritual that people do.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

I mean you think of some of the so called witchcraft they do. It's more about kind of like uh, protection. It's not about attack, it's about defend a lot of it. Or that's how I saw it anyway.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Or healing. Yeah.

Ligeia  
Can happen.

Leraje  
And there seemed to be as much ritual in the kind of like ordinary everyday events they do like the carding of the wool or uh, the gutting of the fish and those kind of like Communal activities. There seem to be just as much ritual and magic. He said in air quotes, in those things.

Ligeia  
People before Internet and TV and radio and, uh, mobile phones and before they had, you know, hundreds of books to just buy every Sunday or Saturday. So they had to do something.

Lithos  
I think there's also the m. Kind of medical aspect, you know, the healing aspect, which is that, you know, we're talking about the early 17th century. And at that time, would you really want to go to. Well, I'll call them quacks, people who call themselves doctors because they didn't even know about basic hygiene or germs or hand washing.

So you might as well go to the local witch because, you know, you know, they've got experience. Uh, to fall back on which one's more likely to heal you is. Is going to be questionable.

Pike  
The blood letter.

Lithos  
Yeah, exactly. Someone who goes, here, here come the leeches. You know, I'm, um, going to cut you open and I'm not even going to wash my hands after I've taken a piss. You know, you go. Right, okay. I might as well go to the witch then.

Leraje  
Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, it is pretty much a coin toss, isn't it? Do I go and see the guy who's going to stick me, or am I going to go and see the old woman who's going to make me eat something horrible? It doesn't really matter at the end of the day.

Ligeia  
Okay, okay, okay. Okay. Leraje, why she. Why is she old?

Leraje  
Good point. Yeah.

Ligeia  
I'm asking. I'm asking for.

Leraje  
No, you're absolutely right. Why did I say old? I don't know. That's kind of like the caricature of a witch, isn't it?

Lithos  
Yeah. Yeah. Because there's only one of them in this novel that's old. Um. Um. Is it daughter? Yeah. Who's. Who lost an eye?

Ligeia  
Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry. It was not attacking you. I just think.

Leraje  
No, you, uh.

Ligeia  
You're absolutely right because that is the usual.

Leraje  
Yeah.

Ligeia  
Uh, image that people.

Leraje  
That's the stereotypical.

Ligeia  
Yeah.

Leraje  
Presentation.

Ligeia  
Ugly, wrinkled woman.

Leraje  
You see, you read to Anton Lavey and look what happens. It gets in your head.

Ligeia  
Yeah, yeah.

Pike  
I think what you said about the ritualistic nature of their magic is spot on. That's how I read it as well, because it's very intertwined with their folklore and it made me think, also because they're women and they're trying to protect themselves. It's also kind of the sort of ritual, quote unquote magic, like you get in Margaret, uh, Atwood.

Right. Whatever. You repeat something or you do something, and it's there to make you feel calmer.

Ligeia  
Yeah.

Leraje  
I mean, that's. That seems to be. That's one of the most common elements of most ritualistic stuff, isn't it? It's the repetition of. It kind of builds up there, like

Ligeia  
a spell being cast. I really liked that. I think. I think the author is like a poet also. Does she. Does she, um.

Lithos  
Yeah. She has published a lot of poetry and she started out as a. I

Ligeia  
believe it was for me that. How. How it was written. I needed to, like, get used to it. I was not expecting that. And I was reading the first, I don't know, 10 pages, maybe three times to. To get into that mood because I didn't want to mess it up for myself, because I was like, this is something new.

This is. This is. I need to. I need to, like. My atoms need to, like, reform somehow in me. Like, what is going on? I'm really liking this, but I need to really be calm and focused. It's not a book that you can read just on the run. I think it would be lost.

Like, the value of the book would be absolutely lost. I think that's why it's very dense. It is dense. Yeah.

Leraje

I. I just loved it for the. The. The. The way it was written there. I. I do. I love poetry anyway, and I've not read any of her poetry, but I'm fully intending to. And this. This whole novel seemed to me the closest thing to poetry that something written in prose could actually be.

Just. I mean, it was just so beautifully written. Really beautifully written. It was very close and internal and narrow and claustrophobic and very sensory. Um, things that. Things were described as. As having smell and a. Kind of like. It was just. Everything was so visceral. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

Ligeia

But I. Do you guys think this book. You could. You could absolutely, um, um, suggest this book to anybody? I don't think it's for everybody. I. I have a feeling I would only suggest this book to a very close person who I know would understand it. I don't think. I don't know. It's not for everybody.

It's not. It. It is not, like, hard to read, but it's not a simple book, I'm trying to say.

Lithos

It certainly wasn't for me.

Ligeia

Yeah, I've been trying to get there. I'm. I'm really excited to hear what. Because I can feel something's going on.

Lithos

Well, I, um. I. A lot of this, because it's so poetic. And I'm not denying it's very poetic. I put a lot of the problems I have down to translation. I do not think poetry translates from one language to another. I think it's impossible, to be honest, uh, because so much of it relies on the words, the cadence, the rhythm, the sound, um, the way the words flow together.

Uh, and you just need to look at something like take a classic like Dante and look at all the various different translations and they're completely different and they all sound like arse compared to the original. And this is a problem I have with the novel. And I'm not saying that the translator is bad because he's translated a lot of books, he's well regarded.

Um, the books garnered good reviews. But for me the prose did not work at all. The poetry fell flat it. In too many places. And I kind of put that down to. To the translation, to be honest, because I. It's not the kind of novel I'd want to have to translate. And I don't think poetic works translate.

Uh, and I think this is an example of it for me anyway. But I don't know because I don't speak Danish. So.

Leraje

Yeah, I usually do struggle with translated material. We've talked about that before. My struggles with the Master & Margarita and things like that. But I didn't have any, um. I don't know. It didn't strike me as that way at all. I thought it was. I don't know, it seemed okay to me. It didn't seem difficult to sort of get the point that was trying to be made.

It didn't. It didn't seem less impactful. Does that make sense?

Lithos

Mhm.

Ligeia

M. M. I need to say for myself, um, M. Because this is not my native language, I might not be picking up on the details that Lithos can. Can obviously see and feel.

Lithos

No, I don't. I don't think it's. It's about details. There's nothing grammatically wrong with it.

Ligeia

You know, it's not. I didn't.

Lithos

I think also poetry, like, like music, that is a thing which, you know, whereas standard prose, you've got a storey, you know, it's written well with poetry and uh, uh, use of a lot of imagery which was used here. If it doesn't ring true to you, then it doesn't ring true to you.

And that's a matter of personal taste.

Leraje

Yeah, absolutely.

Lithos

All I'm saying is my personal taste is this did not work for me at all. Um, it just didn't.

Pike

Did it not work for you.

Ligeia

From.

Pike

To you. Okay. Eraser.

Ligeia

Did it work

Pike

from the beginning? Because I remember when you first started off, I think you were. You were quite into it. And then it's. It slows. Right.

Lithos

At one point I found some passages very, very good and. And very well put together and very evocative. And I found some passages, to be quite frank, completely irritating. Like there was somewhere I was like, literally rolling my eyes and going, oh, uh, no, this is just. And it's kind of the change and the stop start nature of it to me.

Like the flowing passages and then suddenly something which. And it's not like I ploughed through this book. The sections I have problems with, I read again and again and again trying to make sense of them. And they did not make sense to me. They did not work for me. And some of them really annoyed me.

Like the passage towards the beginning where they're all sat together, uh, and they're all talking and trying to get the kind of flow of conversation into it. And there's just the constant repetition of. And someone said and someone said and someone said. And by the end of the page, I was like going, no, this is really annoying me now.

Um, you know, again, like I'm saying, it's a personal thing. It just, you know, some bits were great and some bits really did not work for me at all.

Pike

I would agree on that particular point where it's said somebody, um, passage. Because I felt that way there too. I think she's really, really good and very novel with point of view. But then where she uses repetition. There's another

passage, I think, where, um, King's lieutenants, uh, coming for Marin. And she feels it like a stab in her chest.

And there's that repetition again. It starts off and you think, oh, that's. That's interesting. I see how it works. But then it goes for quite a long time. And you kind of. I don't know. What about Leraje, you said, uh, the language is quite poetic.

Lithos  
Yeah.

Pike  
Did you. Did you enjoy those as well?

Leraje  
I did. I saw it as kind of like reinforcing that. I mean, we've talked before a few minutes ago about rituals. And one of the keys to ritual being repetition. And that seemed to me to be an echo of that. I think she was deliberately doing that as an echo of that. Kind of like ritualistic.

And someone said. And someone said it was kind of like, you know, the bits. Uh, this is. This is not a great example. It's the only one I could think of. The top of my Head. So bits of the, of the Bible. Like if you think of Genesis and somebody begat somebody and somebody begat somebody and somebody begat somebody.

It wasn't necessarily a way of passing on information, but uh, of kind of like introducing a kind of like ritualistic mantra to the feel of it all. And that's how. That was my interpretation of it anyway, that repetition.

Ligeia  
I felt the same. It was almost like chanting M. And also I felt like she was starting the same with the same sentence. Like the sentences with the same. I don't know phrase to. I don't know. For me it sounded like all those feelings or everything that followed was equally important. It was not.

Like I, uh, I've mentioned these three first. And then it's like, you know, I, she, she wanted me to feel all those things like bump, bum, bum, bum. This all was happening, like stabbing her and paining her and hurting. And she wanted me to stop my brain and to feel it. I, I felt it.

It worked for me. But I'm a ritualistic witch or.

Leraje  
I mean that, that kind of like ritualistic text, that uh, repetition. It's almost like punctuation, another form of punctuation.

Ligeia  
Yeah, it worked on me. Yeah.

Pike  
I like the technique itself and I've seen it used before. I just thought it was maybe a little too, you know, used too heavily in.

Leraje  
Overused.

Pike  
Yeah, yeah, but you know, where they, um, where sentences end and said somebody. To me, the effect of it was quite cool because the effect is as if you are in a room and there are loads of people, loads of voices, almost like a coffin. And you hear a bit here and you hear a bit there.

And that, that in itself is, is quite cool. Mhm.

Leraje

But look, I mean, no, no one's obligated to like or fully sort of like process why an author has made a particular choice. We all have our own individual likes and dislikes in terms of sort of like things that happen within a book.

Pike

And we will just cut your opinion out of a podcast.

Ligeia

Women are deciding nowadays.

Lithos

I don't even think it's the author's choice, to be quite honest. This, this is my point. You know, someone said. And um, while I was reading that, I was kind of thinking, I wonder what this sounds like in Danish.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

Because that's where the flow, uh, and the choice of words, the sound of the words is important because when I read I kind of like somehow imagine the sound in my head as well. Especially when I read something poetic like this. Right. I take my time and try and imagine the Sound or someone saying it, and it just didn't.

It didn't flow. And I was kind of thinking, I wonder what it sounds like in Danish, because it might well flow. It might. The. The words might flow better together. And, and this is not the author's choice. And this is the issue with, again, coming back to the. Don't want to bang on about it, but I am, uh.

I don't think poetry is translatable. I do not. I think that Strugatsky was, because it was kind of fairly. Fairly in way, what I'd call sort, uh, of rugged prose, descriptive. And you can do that, but something that is as inherently sort of poetic, metaphorical, image laden as this. The words and the sounds of them really matter.

Leraje

Uh, I do understand what you're saying, but I struggle more with translated prose than I do with translated poetry. I mean, you're absolutely right that you're never going to be 100% sure that you're getting the full impact of what the author who wrote in a particular language might have meant. You're never going to get that.

It's just not going to happen ever. Even the best translation in the entire world of a particular work is never going to give the full impact. But to me, it kind of like it got the. The rhythm was there and the. The ritualistic mantra of it was there. And yeah, it worked okay for me.

But again, it's a personal thing. For some people it will, for some people it won't.

Pike

I wonder. Different people perceive these things differently as well, because you can perceive it more, I don't know, phonetically. Right. Or it might be bringing m. All the poetry for you might be bringing up images and then the rhythm and everything comes from the imagery in your head. It could be that we are just differently.

Leraje

Absolutely. And, um, this is what. Um, that's why I use the example of the Master & Margarita before. Because I read a not very good translation and there were turns of phrase and sort of like idioms and metaphors used that I just

thought what. I don't, I don't get. And I think what the translator had done is translated it.

The phrase which might have made. Had some kind of very culturally specific thing in the original Russian, which had no real, uh, it didn't mean the same thing in. In English. So I was kind of like constantly trying, trying to use search engines to find what a particular phrase might have meant in.

In Russian. Um, which was like an exercise in fucking futility, I tell you.

Lithos

Well, this is. It's kind of the impression I got here was that the translator had translated it too accurately, like literally word for word. And that's why it didn't work for me. But that's just my impression.

Leraje

I don't know. I guess we would have to ask her or him. Um, M. Olga, if you're listening, let us know. We have questions, we have questions. Um, but I suspect she will have had, you know, final, uh, say so over a sort of like translated draught.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Lithos

I mean, I certainly want to read The Employees to see how it compares a previous book again translated by the same person. But you know, like, uh, I say no, not throwing any shade on him, you know, this is, I. It's a book I would not have wanted to even contemplate translating. Yeah.

Having. Just having read poetry in, in uh, the original language and then seen the translation and every time I've seen that in the past, I thought it's shit. That it, uh, that translation is shit. Don't even bother. Just, you know, hear someone read it out in the original language. Even if you don't understand it, it'll sound nice.

Ligeia

How do you feel about the fact that as we know, as we learn, uh, in the book, this is based on real people, real women, at the end there is like a quick summary. There are years, there are dates and the way how they were murdered. That's beautiful. But for me it brought a question because I have no problem with books about witches that are like.

But these were real women. My question is, how do you feel the book, um, dealt with redeeming them from the suggested witchcraft? Like, did it. This is like, I don't know. But there were real women. This is, you know, like m. Did

Leraje

you feel it might be a bit exploitative?

Ligeia

I don't know. This is my question. Maybe I just need to understand it better. I, uh, would like to ask the author. Olga, Hello.

Pike

But I. All you have is criticising this.

Ligeia

I mean, this is not criticism. It's like my truthful question, like, how would you feel if you were like ancestors of this person? I don't know. Not ancestors. Um, the other way you, you know, descended.

Leraje

Yeah. Yeah.

Ligeia

Yes. Because it didn't say they were not doing it. It was like ambiguous, which is, I'm, um, not criticising it, you know, but it, it never said, like, obviously they were not supposed to die or suffer whatever they did. But was it on purpose? I don't know. Maybe she's really brave. I, I kind of liked it that she didn't go that way of romanticising it.

Lithos

And, you know, she did a phenomenal amount of research and really deserves praise for the amount of research she's done.

Ligeia

Why, I would like to know from her, like, and, uh, maybe how maybe,

Pike

you know, one of them literally shat on someone's doorstep, and it's

Ligeia

all possible.

Lithos

No reason to. To burn anyone. I mean, I'd love to. On Nigel Farage's doorstep. You know,

Ligeia

no reason for them to suffer for any of that.

Lithos

You know, I mean, from what. From what I've read about Christenza Krocow. Christenza, uh, however it's pronounced. She, um. There were. There were wax children made. That was one of the things that actually did apparently happen.

Ligeia

Yes.

Lithos

Um, so a certain amount of this did happen and that doubtlessly they would have cast spells. I didn't see them being presented in a bad light for it. I saw them as just being presented as people who are just going about their stuff, and it was completely normal for them. And they didn't even regard it as.

As sort of witchcraft of devilry because they're talking about God at certain points.

Ligeia

Yeah, that's true.

Lithos

They are actually. They do actually believe in God.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

There's this kind of overlap between sort of like, uh, folk tradition and, um, what we call witchcraft. That's. There's this blurred line between the two. That is the two things are not necessarily separate from each other.

Ligeia

Yeah. And superstition and all the spells. I love the spells.

Leraje

I didn't feel like their memory was being kind of like, besmirched or anything like that. It didn't feel that way to me. I think it would have been dishonest of her to say they weren't really doing witchcraft, because maybe they were, but. So the issue is. Not. For me, m. The issue is not were they doing witchcraft.

It was. Why is witchcraft considered bad?

Pike  
What?

Ligeia  
Yeah. What did the people do to them for.

Lithos  
They were just doing folk. Folk spells, old traditional folk spells. You know, you calling it witchcraft or whatever, it's just, like, stuff passed down through generations. Oh. If, you know, if you're ill with this, have some goat's milk or whatever. You know, even at the beginning, is it witchcraft?

Ligeia  
The childbirth? Like, those scenes were so powerful to me. How. Oh, my God. That was. Oh. Oh, my God, that was so strong. Also, I needed to Google. Google, uh, skin girdle. Yes.

Pike  
Yeah.

Ligeia  
Like, what are we talking about? What. What is she holding? What are they holding? What's happening?

Pike  
So explain the skin girdle to us now.

Ligeia  
Me?

Lithos  
Yes.

Pike  
Well, you Google.

Lithos  
You mentioned it If I. Yeah, if I understood.

Ligeia  
If I understood it was something. I think it was made of, like, leather.

Pike  
I didn't Google it. Don't look at me.

Ligeia  
I'm, um, looking at everybody. Nobody's helping. Okay, so go on. No, I don't know what's happening. I forgot, uh, for the context.

Pike  
A woman is giving birth, and then the. The circle of women are passing around skin, uh, girdle. And when a woman is holding it, she takes over the. The pain of giving birth from the woman who's actually giving birth. And that way they are helping her. And then a man is given a skin girdle to hold, and he, I, uh, think nearly passes out.

Yes.

Lithos  
He can't handle the pain because he,

Ligeia  
uh, asked like, why is she screaming so much? Like, what the hell? Why? Why?

Pike  
It's a great scene.

Ligeia  
They gave it to him, and he was like, no, take this away. I can't bear this pain.

Leraje  
Well, I might have a really stupid interpretation of it.

Pike  
Um, tell us about your skin girdle.

Leraje  
I assumed it was kind of like some combination of maybe afterbirth or, uh, amniotic sack that had come out with a baby. I don't know. I mean, I didn't look it up. Uh, that's the only thing I could think it might be.

Ligeia  
I understood it in a way. Like, after the birthday, it's good to put something quite heavy or like, tight on the. On the belly to. To, like, help the uterus and the whole belly to not be that big later, you know? So. So when I gave birth, they gave me a little. It looks like the, um, rolling thing for a doll, but it was for my body, and I was, like, using that on my belly.

And, um, a waist trainer, whatever, you know.

Pike  
Right.

Ligeia  
Flexible but really tight thing that helps the whole body to get back.

Leraje  
Yeah.

Lithos  
I mean, what the object was, uh, I thought was irrelevant. I saw it as a kind of metaphor that, like, yeah, you're taking the pain away. You're dealing with the pain.

Leraje  
Yeah.

Lithos  
And, yeah, maybe.

Leraje  
Maybe it literally is that. Maybe it isn't an actual physical thing at all.

Ligeia  
It is. It is. I actually really found it.

Leraje  
Oh, really?

Lithos  
Oh, right.

Ligeia  
That's what I'm saying. Like, I thought it might be made up or something. I will never. But I found a lot of stuff around it that I read. Just like, a few sentences. So I think it actually existed in the past.

Leraje  
Right.

Lithos  
M. Well, I'm. M sure it did, because everything's pretty accurate in there.

Pike  
You can tell where a lot of research went into, because There are a lot of technical names for M, various things that no longer exist.

Ligeia  
Even the spells, I think they're actually real spells that existed and she just like, collected them into this book.

Lithos  
M. Yeah, yeah. And the descriptions of like, what they did with the herring and what they did with the wool and all that went into real detail there. Yeah, it's really impressive. So what did you think, Pike, about the. Because you didn't. In answer to Ligeia's early question about how did you feel the witches were represented or the women were represented?

Pike  
Well, uh, the real women. This is 17th century, I think. Any descendants by now, you know, they wouldn't have any strong feelings about these ancestors from a very long time ago. So I didn't feel like that was uncomfortable, um, for Mila, but she used real women. Uh, and I liked that they were very human.

It wasn't always flattering to them. The storey, you know. Uh, yeah, there is the shitting on the doorstep. There is, um, the woman who Christenze, uh, you know, towards the end, says, I'm noble, get me out of here.

Ligeia  
Yeah, that's so human.

Leraje  
Fuck these guys save me.

Pike  
Yes. They are not. They're fairly rounded characters and they're not perfect. If you wrote about people who existed, even, say, I don't know, a hundred years ago, it would be a lot more sensitive.

Lithos  
Yeah, I mean, she didn't, uh. It's the second time that she actually went, you know, um, when she went, um, I'm noble, get me out of here. It's the second time she was accused of witchcraft. The first time she bugged off. That was in Nakabola. And the woman who got executed was called.

Oh, what was her name?

Leraje  
Uh, uh. Wasn't she Christenze's maid or something like that?

Lithos  
She was. I think she was a maid in the house. And Christenze. Uh. And again, this is from what I've read about the actual case. Christenze was from nobility,

um, but as a daughter, she's. The custom at the time was you sent to another noble person's house to be brought up as a.

As nobility and then that. I think Ousse was someone who worked in the house, basically.

Leraje  
Right, right. Mhm.

Lithos  
So not. Not nobility.

Leraje  
No. So this novel made me cry on three separate occasions. Did anyone else cry? Please tell me it wasn't just me. You did too.

Ligeia  
I did.

Pike  
I got very, very angry at various points because I was reading it at a point also when a lot of men were really, really, really, uh, annoying me. And it just all Piled, uh, up. I felt helpless. Rage more than sadness.

Lithos  
Mhm. I also got really angry at certain points where, you know, where they were kind of like just accusing them and you know, treating them shabbily and ignoring what was going on. And you know, some of the men were um, you know, had been friendly. What was the name of the guy who, who, who uh, who said he'd seen them through the window and then afterwards regretted it.

Yeah, you know, um, yeah, sort of real sort of points. It didn't make me sad at any point. It didn't have that effect on me. Um, it. But it did make me angry at certain points.

Leraje  
I don't think that when I, when it made me cry, I don't think it was out of sadness. It was, it was more anger. Uh, and kind of like frustrated. I was. There was, There was part of the novel when they were recounting the cost of executing a woman.

Pike  
Oh yeah.

Leraje  
And they were listing all the ale for the. The executioner. Uh, and this is how much the rope got. This is how much the coals. And that bit made me cry. And it was just out of sheer utter frustration that, you know, they. People genuinely saw that as an important consideration in whether to fucking kill somebody.

Ligeia  
That was disgusting.

Leraje  
Just uh.

Lithos  
Ah.

Ligeia  
Mhm.

Leraje

It's so difficult to get your head into the mindset of people who would think that way.

Lithos

Yeah, well, I think there's plenty of them still about.

Leraje

Yeah.

Lithos

You know, cost above all, basically.

Leraje

Yeah.

Pike

What were the other two places we cried?

Leraje

Oh God. Uh, during their. And again air quotes trial when the daughter had to give evidence against her mum and it was just like, oh, this is just too much that uh, I mean, I think you guys have all said that it took you quite a long time to get through this. I read it in two days.

You know, I'm not saying I'm um, better or faster or anything. I just couldn't, I literally couldn't put it down. I just couldn't put it down. But at that point I did have to put it down.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Because it just got. It was too real. It was just too awful. The thought of this poor girl being forced to give evidence against her own mother. She clearly didn't want to. And then her mum said, gave her words of encouragement when she was on the stand and it was just like, uh, oh, this is just the most awful thing in the world.

It's horrible. I can't remember the other time.

Lithos

Was it. Was it when her head went in the gutter?

Leraje

No, it wasn't. I Mean I did feel very, very sorry for Christenze but to be honest with you, I felt more empathy with the other women than I did with Christenze herself. I'm m not quite sure why.

Lithos

Yeah, certainly with the one who went mad from the torture. Just completely lost. Lost it. Yeah, that's when I told you that was. Yeah.

Ligeia

And when they were like in that prison sort of and they were in the corners and there was this part where they were like couldn't see each other and they were like, somebody's touching me. Is that you? Who is it? We are still alive. We are still alive. So who are you? I can't see anybody.

Are you still here? I'm like, they are going all crazy and they can't see and they are naked and everything is just. I see. I'm gonna cry. That was just like how can you treat a human being like this? How? For what?

Leraje

The debasement of their uh, humanity was just terrible.

Pike

Yeah, I thought, um, Apolene.

Lithos

Apolene, yeah, yeah, that's the one who went. Yeah, lost it.

Pike

And Elisabeth, whom we haven't mentioned much actually I thought both of them were showing different ways that the society can break somebody who is seen as an outsider. Where Elisabeth breaks, you know, by saying, okay, I am what you say I am, but it's past me now. I am going to conform and now I'm going to be uh, exactly what you want me to be.

And then she's just hollowed out from the inside. That was really sad for me in the 20th trial where she's, you know, you can see that conflict in her and then up alone she, uh, she also internalises it because we torture the out of her and then, and then she, but she does not conform.

She just says, well I am what you say I am and nothing. And then gets murdered for it. Yeah, and that was quite, I found that quite terrible because as Satanists we, you know, never mind all other aspects of our identity, we, I think, see ourselves as outsiders in some, in some way.

And just having it laid out like that, these are the two different ways they can break you. It's harrowing.

Leraje

There's a piece of work called, uh, La Sorcier which, and the translation for that is the Witch, um, written by a French social historian called, uh, Jules M. Michelet. And the Witch is, is about. It's kind of like a social history of the, kind of like the serfs of mediaeval France and Europe as a whole.

And he says no, they were practising witchcraft and Satanism. It was an act of class warfare. It was because God was for the rich people. God was for the rulers. And therefore in their desperation to have some kind of autonomy and control the poor, the working classes, the serfs, turned to God's adversary, Satan.

Lithos

I don't think that happened in any of this. I mean, from what I certainly read in the book, it seemed that none of them had any kind of like affiliation with the devil and that they did actually believe in a God.

Pike

Um, they did believe in the devil as well. Right. Remember we had.

Lithos

Oh yeah, but they, they didn't.

Pike

Yeah. How do you remember, uh, the bit with the blowing of a candle?

Ligeia

M. Yeah, but also guys, they. It doesn't matter if they believed they were women. Women. Do you remember? There is this like just. I will read a few sentences just here. I was looking for this one.

Lithos

I think it might be the same one.

Ligeia

I'm certain, I'm certain. Page 72. So they consulted their books of demonology and they read, the woman is more easily tempted by Satan, for she is weaker than

the men in both body and soul. And they read the woman is a wicked and imperfect animal. When a woman weeps, she weaves snares and labours to deceive a man.

Um, it goes and goes and goes. I'm like

Leraje

going back to what I was saying about Jules Michelet earlier. That was kind of his point that it was that they weren't necessarily saying Hail Satan or as a kind of like supernatural thing or an invocation to call an actual Satan. It was more like it was a response to what the church were putting on them as people.

And that was, I think this, what that was reflected, I mean, especially in that passage you just read there. I mean, which is clearly men trying to control women and um, who, who they feel, uh, should have no autonomy and no power.

Ligeia

So well written, by the way.

Lithos

Mhm.

Pike

I just had a really awful big thought inspired by what you said, which is not strictly speaking about the book. And I don't think we should dwell on it, but I'll just say what I, um, was thinking, you know, how maybe now the kind of certain reprehensible views of some people come from this similar idea of being the antagonist.

Because you, if you like the affluent middle classes, have the moral high ground. You have by being, and I consider myself totally woke by being woke you. You have a moral high ground. You can tell people that they are, you know, they're treating other people badly and therefore they're bad, and so on and so forth.

And I think for some people, maybe, uh, it's not necessarily that they are awful people, but they're just resisting.

Leraje

They feel powerless.

Pike

They cannot. Yeah, they feel powerless and they are saying, oh, yeah, all right, well, I don't need it. I cannot have your shit, so I don't need your shit. I'm going to be the opposite.

Leraje

I'm sure that's true. Yeah. I mean, we, uh. I think we can see that playing out in, certainly in British society at the moment. But I don't know that, you know, I am also woke to the fucking max. But, um, I don't know that I see myself as morally superior to anybody, but more like these are the things I believe.

And it bewilders me that people can't understand that that point of view comes from each person's rights to be who they are. As long as what they are doesn't negatively affect anybody else, no one's being hurt.

Pike

That's a nuanced individual point of view. Right. But when you see people as a mass, you know, the messaging that comes through is a lot less. A lot less subtle. Yeah, yeah. Anyway, I'm sorry for this tangent.

Leraje

No, no, it's a good one.

Ligeia

Was a great point. Yes.

Pike

Let's get back to the book.

Lithos

I, uh, didn't get any impression through the book that they had any particular disrespectful feelings towards the church. They had disrespectful feelings towards the priest who was married to Elisabeth and beat her. For good reason.

Pike

Yeah.

Leraje

Um, you know, I think to people of that age, the two things were not separable, not separatable.

Lithos

I suppose so, yeah.

Leraje

It's kind of like if you criticise the man, you're also criticising the church because that man is a pastor. Therefore, to them there was no division in that. You're not criticising the man, you're criticising the man of God. I'm not saying that's an excuse or a good reason. It's completely crap. But I think possibly that's how people of that time period, and I'm not.

That's not just. That's not unique to Denmark. That's pretty common across all of Europe, I think, at that time.

Pike

Yeah. It's very hard to tell. Right. What the people were thinking or whether they were thinking at all about the church, because none of the characters, you know, is philosophising on that at any point. They are too. They're busy with the work they need to do and, um, you know, the day to day surviving.

Yeah.

Ligeia

And specifically, what do we know about what women were thinking. That's a different point. Women think what they were thinking.

Pike

Yeah.

Ligeia

Like in history, you know, like, even what we are learning in history, in the classes, it's not written.

Leraje

No, it's all written by men.

Ligeia

Um, so. Yeah, sorry, that's a different.

Leraje

And, uh, maybe that's why a novel like this is so important, because it does give that kind of. Like, even a fictionalised account is going to be better than no account at all. And I think we can sort of, like, extrapolate. I mean, pike, you're saying that they never sort of, like, discussed their religion?

They never discussed their beliefs? They just did, you know, they did this on this day, they did that, uh, on the other day. But they never talked about. But

maybe people didn't. I think when something like religion is so intrinsic to how you live your life every day, it's such a common thing, you don't necessarily.

It's not really talked about.

Ligeia  
Maybe it's that you don't question it.

Pike  
It's not an option.

Leraje  
Yeah.

Ligeia  
It is the truth. You are living. So.

Leraje  
Yeah. And I also think that a lot of it, a lot of the novel was centred around the idea that, as Lithos said earlier, these women are not necessarily anti religion, uh, or anti Christianity. For the benefit of the listener, Lithos just dropped his headphones.

Lithos  
He's trying to scratch an itch and knock my headphones off. It's like one of those. It's in a spot where is it easier to get to it this way or that way? And I knock my headphones off.

Leraje  
This is why.

Lithos  
All right.

Leraje  
Yeah.

Pike  
For the benefit of the listener, Leraje has a poker that he uses to scratch his mouth.

Leraje  
It's my grabber for when my hands don't work properly, but it also doubles as a scratcher.

Ligeia  
Oh, my goodness. Um.

Lithos  
Put your sex toys away.

Leraje  
It's not very thick, is it? I mean, I don't know what you're gonna get out of that anyway.

Lithos  
Um.

Leraje  
I can't remember what I was saying now.

Pike  
What were I.

Leraje

What was I talking about? Um, I think part of what this novel was trying to say is that it wasn't that these women weren't religious or weren't Christian. It's that they weren't Christian enough for, you know, they. Behaviour that their behaviour was never going to be. I mean, that passage you read out earlier, how can anybody possibly.

With that against you, how can you possibly ever be. You can't ever measure up to that. You know, there's always going to be Some bullshit reason to accuse you of witchcraft.

Ligeia

Any excuse is good enough. You ugly. You are Satan. You're too pretty. You are Satan. You, uh. You limp. You're Satan. What the fuck are you doing, guys? And, uh, the wax child wants to

Leraje

talk about the wax child a little bit.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Lithos

M. No, I was just going to say it's interesting. We haven't. And how do people feel about that as a literary device in the novel? As the kind of. Because it's kind of. Basically the whole thing is written from the point of view of the wax child. And the wax child being made of wax has no particular emotional response to stuff.

Pike

Oh no.

Lithos

It's certainly how I.

Pike

They do. They do.

Lithos

Did you. Did you think they did? This is the interesting part we're getting to. I. I felt they didn't. I felt they just took in stimuli and sort of gave back what the stimuli were they were receiving from whatever from the soil, from the sky, from the people that they inhabited at certain points.

Um, but I got the impression that they did not. They were emotionless in watching the whole thing.

Pike

Wax child made me the same saddest in the whole book. Because wax child is constantly lonely and bemoans that they were created for a human who knew they would perish. And now they have to stay there forever, completely alone. I thought of the wax child like that kid robot in the Spielberg film.

You know, where I think the kid is underwater at the end or something and just. Just sitting there forever. Cannot die. Cannot live.

Lithos

Um, that's interesting.

Leraje

There was a couple of points when the wax child says that it's constantly waiting for Christenze to come back.

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

And I felt that was. I do understand what you were saying. Lithos. There did seem to be this kind of like dry recitation of events as they happened. But also I don't. I didn't feel that it was. The wax child itself was like this emotionless kind of like.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Object.

Ligeia

Yeah. Because it was also sometimes saying like, nobody is holding me. I don't feel loved or something. Like.

Pike

Yeah.

Ligeia

I thought it's mostly like being sentient. But also at some point the. Like the consciousness was present. M. In a way that made me feel like there are feelings. How awful that is.

Lithos

Oh, I. I thought that's kind of like that it was anthropomorphizing the fact that it's. It's made of wax. I, uh. I did not. And other things was like, you know, the analogy of the robot was made that that's the way I felt. About it. It was like it's a little robot and you know the.

It does not understand emotion. Yes. It's alone. It's waiting. But it's just been created for that purpose. All it wants is to fulfil its purpose because that's what it was made for. Like a robot. That. That's the way I saw it. And it might be my pat. My poncho for sci fi. That's put.

Ligeia

But this was made of that on it pieces of nails and hair.

Lithos

Yeah.

Ligeia

Human stuff. So.

Pike

So Lithos. Did you feel that the little kid robot had no feelings on the Spielberg film?

Lithos

I didn't see the film. Sorry.

Ligeia

Me neither. I have no idea.

Pike

I cried. Okay, another tangent back back to the Wax Child.

Ligeia

Okay.

Leraje

What's the name of the movie?

Ligeia  
Movie Night?

Pike  
I don't know. Is it A.I. uh, is it. I m. I don't know. I have.

Ligeia  
You just made it up.

Lithos  
Wall-e. It will be in no Wall-e or no.

Pike  
No it's not. It will be in the show notes. We'll put in the show notes.

Ligeia  
Yeah, okay.

Leraje  
We'll find it. We'll find it.

Pike  
Maybe it's got Jude Law as a uh, sex robot.

Leraje  
Jude Law is a sex robot.

Pike  
Well, he's a gigolo, uh, robot now

Leraje  
I have to see this film.

Pike  
I didn't know you were into Jude Law.

Leraje  
I'm not. It's just the idea of Jude Law being a sex robot. I'm intrigued and somewhat fascinated. Is he is. Do people think he's good looking?

Ligeia  
Jude Law?

Leraje  
I've never really.

Ligeia  
I need to Google. I have no clue who that is.

Pike  
This conversation has gone low brow.

Leraje  
Oh yeah. Ah we've got.

Lithos  
Yeah, yeah, we're talking. We're talking about the Wax child here. But I think it's interesting that we each got different perspectives on what the wax child represents. Is actually quite good because it does mean that you know that was left to your imagination to a certain extent.

Leraje

It's almost as if the wax child is a receptacle which is open to all of our opinions and um. Beliefs.

Lithos

Yes, yes, yes.

Leraje

A semi sentient device. It was cleverly done. I thought it was awesome.

Lithos

Yeah, it was a very interesting. And I don't want to dwell on the negatives because I think there were some really great passages that I enjoyed in the book as well.

Pike

Do we want to do some favourite quotes?

Lithos

Hatred comes to the one who trembles. I pity them. I pity my mistress. I pity Marin and Marin's servant girl. I pity the humans. Reckless, quickly absorbed and used up. Like nylon stockings that run the same evening they are worn. Although the use of nylon in there did surprise me. But then I suppose the thing is still alive.

The wax child lives forever.

Leraje

Yeah. That's the thing from modern times. Yeah.

Lithos

Yeah.

Pike

I was surprised at that point as well. Okay. Um, I've got a very romantic one. Um, the still being of night entwines itself in the treetops. I think I love her with that part of me that is never illuminated. I think that's beautiful.

Ligeia

Now I feel stupid for what I'm gonna read.

Pike

Well, we just had nylon stockings, so.

Ligeia

Yeah. Okay. I really like this spells. So I have this one which made me giggle. Okay, so listen. Cast some blood of a hair into the fire so that it makes a smell. Then all the girls of the house will piss themselves or give them blood from a bat. And those who have mixed with men will piss themselves.

Not what I have. I have more, but they are long, like three pages. I don't want to. You know, people need to read the book, but this was fun.

Leraje

And I was in the king's ear. And I was in the king's mouth. And I was in the king's loose tooth and in the quicksilver of his liver and did hear, uh, a scratching of the pen across the paper as he wrote a royal letter to his deputy. It's a fairly innocuous paragraph, but it just encapsulates everything that I loved about this novel.

The kind of, like, immediacy, the closeness, the kind of, like, claustrophobia of it. And also the. The kind of poetical, lyrical beauty of it as well.

Lithos

And also the accuracy that, you know. Yeah, he will have had mercury in his liver, uh, in them days.

Ligeia  
Yes.

Pike  
I don't know another writer who does quite the same thing with point of view as she does. It was completely new to me.

Lithos  
It was certainly an absolutely. It was. It was a unique book. Sort of like quite unlike anything else I've read.

Leraje  
Let's do pitchforks, then. Lithos, you go first.

Lithos  
Okay. I. I will give it a seven. Just, uh, from the effect it had on me. And I am putting some of that down to the translation, I'm afraid.

Leraje  
Fair. Uh, Ligeia?

Ligeia  
I'm gonna give it a ten.

Pike  
Wow.

Leraje  
Pike?

Pike  
I am m. Torn between eight and nine, so I'll say eight and a half. I think she's a fantastic writer. It did get a little weaker for me, um, towards the end, but it's still a fantastic book.

Leraje  
Uh, it's 10 from me as well. I just loved it. Unconditionally loved it. It was just brilliant. M. Yeah. Okay. Right, so that was the Wax Child by Olga Ravn. Um, as ever, those are just our opinions. If you want have an opinion, read the fucking book. As Lithos would say.

Lithos  
Yeah, indeed.

Leraje  
And speaking of Lithos, it's your choice next. What are we reading next?

Lithos  
Oh, we are reading the Wasp Factory by Ian Banks.

Pike  
Yay.

Leraje  
Okay.

Lithos  
It's gonna be grim and gruesome.

Leraje  
Right, so that's what we'll be doing next. I've been Leraje. Hail Satan.

Lithos  
Hail Satan.

Pike  
Hail Satan.

Ligeia  
Don't burn, witches. Hail Satan.

[Outro music]