

#RESILIENCE AND WIT

Marilyn Monroe and the Potato Sack Dress

One particularly sharp-tongued reporter criticized the gown, calling it 'cheap' and 'vulgar.' The reporter said that Monroe would look better in a 'potato sack.'



Marilyn Monroe, one of the most iconic and beloved actresses of the 20th century, was no stranger to public scrutiny. Her beauty, talent, and personal life were often the subject of intense media attention. However, one particular moment in Monroe's career highlighted not only the harshness of the media but also her ability to turn criticism into a clever, witty response.

In 1952, Marilyn attended the Photoplay Awards in a stunning red gown that accentuated her natural curves and glamorous allure. But, as was often the case with her, not everyone was enamored with her appearance. One particularly sharp-tongued reporter criticized the gown, calling it 'cheap' and 'vulgar.'

The reporter even went so far as to say that Monroe would look better in a 'potato sack.' It was a cruel, dismissive remark that both questioned her taste and dismissed her beauty in the most superficial way.

Monroe, ever the savvy woman, turned this insult into a moment of both humor and brilliance. In a move that showcased her wit and grace, costume designer Jean Louis (who had worked with her on many films) designed a 'potato sack' dress as a playful and satirical response to the harsh criticism. The dress, created for the Academy Awards in 1953, was a clever comment on the absurdity of the reporter's insult. Monroe wore it with confidence, making a statement that beauty is not about the price tag or the label but about owning who you are, regardless of what the world thinks.

The Great Depression and the Potato Sack as a Symbol

The 'potato sack' also had a deeper meaning, linked to the economic realities of the

Great Depression. During that time, women were often forced to make do with limited resources. Financial hardships meant that many families, particularly in rural America, had to resort to using 'potato sacks' as makeshift clothing. The simplicity of the sack became a symbol of economic struggle, but also of resourcefulness and resilience.

The 'potato sack' dress was an act of defiance against societal norms that reduced women to nothing more than their physical appearance or their ability to adhere to beauty standards set by the media.

Beauty Beyond the Price Tag

Monroe's response also challenged the prevailing notion that beauty is defined by the price tag of a dress or the extravagance of a gown. The media often reduced women like Monroe to their clothes, bodies, and public personas, rather than acknowledging their complexity as individuals. By wearing the 'potato sack' dress, Monroe made a powerful statement: that beauty transcends appearance and is not dependent on wealth, status, or expensive attire.

Cultural Impact and Legacy

Monroe's response to the 'potato sack' comment remains one of the most memorable moments in Hollywood history. It is a perfect example of her ability to embrace her persona and transform criticism into empowerment. Over time, the 'potato sack' dress has become more than just a witty response; it symbolizes the tension between beauty and the societal expectations placed on women, and how these standards can be subverted and redefined.



The 'City of Witches'



Benevento is a little more than two hours by train from Rome.

• Kshema Jatuhkarna

Stepping off the train in the southern Italian city of Benevento is not a particularly haunting experience, in the sense that the air on a brisk October day yields nothing other than cloud cover and fog. That this is the so-called 'city of witches,' the site where women from all over the country might have flown in the middle of the night to dance around a famous walnut tree and to learn, effectively, how to be a witch, is not immediately apparent.

Where the witchiness of Benevento, a city of over 55,000 with a Roman theater and Arch of Trajan from ancient times, may be most felt is in the traditions of its residents, many of whom still hold close these passed-down superstitions. Depending on whom you ask, a curse of the evil eye must still be ward off with a specific ritual involving oil and water and a traditional prayer. Leaving a broom at your door is a good way to ensure that the local witches, known as the Janare, won't sneak under the threshold, they'll be too distracted counting the strands of straw. And if you wake to find that your horse's mane has been braided, a Janara must have taken it for a late-night ride.

Even now, when Maria Scarinzi, an anthropologist and head of education programs at Janua, Benevento's Museum of Witches, interviews older residents about their beliefs, she finds that they hesitate to share everything for fear of retribution.

"They still believe that if you name the Janara, she will come to your house at night and she will harm you in some way," Scarinzi says. "They still believe that if I tell you that I know the formula for getting rid of maggots, you will think that I am a Janara and you'll distance me from society."



The Arch of Trajan in Benevento dates back to 114 C.E.

The hunting and persecution of so-called witches was a practice that began to take root in Italy in the late 1300s, supervised and carried out in many ways by the Catholic Church. By 1542, Pope Paul III had created the Congregation of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, which tasked the church with criminalizing those who would speak against the faith. It was an amorphous crime because any misfortune to befall a person or town could be attributed to a witch, around 80 per cent of the people charged with witchcraft in early-modern Europe were women. Academics estimate that 22,000 to 33,000 witchcraft trials took place in Italy, with very few of these ending in capital punishment. Witch hunting appeared to largely come to an end by the 18th century.

How Benevento became the city of witches

Some researchers argue that this southern Italian town, a little more than two hours by train from Rome, became known for its witches because of its unique political position. But to understand the root of the myth, we have to go back to 1428. The hunting and persecution of so-called witches was a practice that began to take root in Italy in the late 1300s, supervised and carried out in many ways by the Catholic Church. By 1542, Pope Paul III had created the Congregation of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, which tasked the church with criminalizing those who would speak against the faith. It was an amorphous crime because any misfortune to befall a person or town could be attributed to a witch, around 80 per cent of the people charged with witchcraft in early-modern Europe were women. Academics estimate that 22,000 to 33,000 witchcraft trials took place in Italy, with very few of these ending in capital punishment. Witch hunting appeared to largely come to an end by the 18th century.

The first reference to Benevento as a place where witches gather dates to 1428. It comes from the transcripts of the trial of Matteuccia di Francesco, a 40-year-old woman, who was eventually sentenced to death and burned at the stake for witchcraft by the Franciscan Bernardino of Siena in the Umbrian town of Todi.

From Matteuccia, we receive the famous formula, or incantation, that has since become inextricably associated with Benevento: "Unguento, unguento / mandame a la noce de Benivento, / supra aqua et supra ad vento / et supra ad omne maltempo."

Translation: "Ointment, ointment / send me to the walnut tree of Benevento / over water and over wind / and over all bad weather." During the trial, Matteuccia confesses that she spreads a cream on herself and chants to be sent to

#SUPERSTITION



The marketing of the yellow-colored liqueur, made in part with saffron, juniper and mint and bearing a slightly sweet yet smooth taste, was indelibly linked to the city and its witches.



The logo of Benevento's professional football club, which features a witch.

the walnut tree of Benevento, which had demonic associations and was thought to be near the river Sabato.

"From that moment on, the inquisitors try to make the witches confess that they went to Benevento, because it becomes a sort of indictment," says Paola Caruso, who has published books on the folklore of Benevento. "If they went to Benevento, then that means they're witches."

In fact, according to Caruso, after Matteuccia's confession, nearly all the Italian witch trials of the 15th and 16th centuries reference, in some way, Benevento as a gathering place for witches. No records exist, however, of witch trials in Benevento itself, though this could be attributed to the World War II bombing of the city's central cathedral, that destroyed much of the ecclesiastical archives, Scarinzi says.

By 1640, local medical examiner Pietro Piperno penned his historical treatise on, among other things, the walnut tree of Benevento, explaining the origins of its supernatural powers. He claimed, according to Caruso, that it is not those from Benevento who participate in the late-night gathering of witches around the walnut tree, but people coming from elsewhere. In many ways, this only reinforced the link between Benevento and the witches.

Caruso's research is built on the idea that Benevento became the 'city of witches' because of its political isolation. Even when surrounded by the Romans, up until the third century B.C.E., the city once called Maleventum was ruled by the Samnites. It was eventually subsumed into the Romans' dominion, but after the fall of the Empire, by the sixth century C.E., the Lombards arrived, establishing Spoleto in Umbria and Benevento as their two southern duchies. What made Benevento unique is that, despite its

association with the Lombards, it managed to remain in large part independent from centralized control until the late 11th century C.E., when it was taken over by the papacy and largely stayed under papal control until becoming part of Italy in 1860. The fact that it had retained some sense of governing autonomy for so long sowed insecurity in the political leaders of the time.

"We must imagine Benevento as a very rich city, a papal city, an obligatory halfway point, you had to pass through Benevento," Scarinzi says. "We have to imagine it also as a kind of island in what was the Kingdom of Naples, difficult to conquer with all this wealth. So, how can I discredit someone? It's what we still do today: I speak ill of that person."

The targets of this abuse were generally local women known as healers, 'almost women of science,' Scarinzi says, or practitioners of what would today be called herbal medicine. These were women who knew the medicinal value of herbs like St. John's wort, lavender and dandelion, gleaned from information passed down to them through generations.

"The negativity around these women was linked to the fact that people were afraid," Scarinzi says, "because they were women who had a power, which, in many cases, was medicine."

The modern-day legacy

The Museum of Witches, located in the Palazzo Paolo V off the city's pedestrian Corso Garibaldi, is a testament to how the customs survive in the daily lives of its residents.

For a couple of decades, anthropologists have been interviewing people about the history and customs of the larger province of Benevento. Part of this effort has been to talk with the elderly, mostly those 70 years and older, to preserve



Step Into Wellness: Celebrating Walk to Work Day

Walk to Work Day encourages people to embrace the simple habit of walking instead of relying on motorised transport for daily commutes. This initiative promotes physical fitness, reduces carbon emissions, and fosters a healthier relationship with the environment. Even small changes, such as walking a portion of the journey or choosing stairs over lifts, can significantly improve cardiovascular health and mental well-being. Beyond health benefits, walking also helps reduce traffic congestion and air pollution in urban areas. As cities become more crowded, adopting sustainable commuting habits can contribute to cleaner, greener communities while enhancing personal fitness and mindfulness.



The Walnut of Benevento (Sabbath of Witches), 1822-1826, by Giuseppe Pietro Bagetti Molteni & Motta.

Keeping the legend alive

Outside of the customs and superstitions ingrained in the culture of Benevento, there's a capitalist reason why the legend has survived: the Liqueure Strega, founded in 1860 by Giuseppe Alberti, who opened his bar in the center of Benevento.

"He decided to name the product after the legend of the city where it was born," says Kenia Palma, marketing manager for Strega Alberti, the company that produces the liqueur.

Strega means 'witch' in Italian. It didn't take long for Strega to become a symbol of Benevento, the marketing of the yellow-colored liqueur, made in part with saffron, juniper and mint and bearing a slightly sweet yet smooth taste, was indelibly linked to the city and its witches. The label bears an illustration of witches dancing around a walnut tree. Today, its store is the first thing you see when descending from the train station. Palma notes that, on bottles of the liqueur, the location is even written as 'near the train station,' because Benevento has long been considered an important junction that connected north and south.

The Alberti family worked to make Liqueure Strega a symbol of Italy itself. In the 1920s, the brand enlisted well-known Futurist artist Fortunato Depero to create stylized advertisements. After the war, Guido Alberti helped to start the country's famous literary prize, Premio Strega, named in the brand's honour.

In a way, Palma hypothesizes, the liqueur has kept the witches of Benevento alive, but with a more positive characterization than that of the witch trials of Italy's past. "We have always recounted the dance of the witches, the Sabbath, the magical rituals, the magical potions," Palma says, pointing out that one of the brand's chocolates is even called Incantesimo, or 'magic spell.' "We have always had a positive communication."

It's not only Italians that have remained enchanted by the legend.

American writer Johnny Marciano came to the town in 2002 after reading a brief reference to the witches in a guidebook on Campania, the region of Naples and Benevento. While he didn't leave with an immediate impression of the witches, the legend sparked him to write a two-page story on a town in which the children actually listened to their parents because of the mere threat of the Janara.

Years later, that idea would become 'The Witches of Benevento,' a six-book children's series by Marciano and Sophie Blackall. In his research, Marciano was struck by the stories he heard residents recount 'with all sincerity.'

"People told me stories that their grandmother had swaddled their mother and left to go to something, and came back and found their mother was somehow no longer swaddled," Marciano says, "and the only answer was that it had to be the Janara." Marciano harnessed this spirit by normalizing the idea of the witches within his fictional world. "We made it more comical and annoying," he says. "It's just going to be normal. You're going to get used to it, so, it's kind of like, how do you weave it into everyday life?"

In the first book, five cousins find themselves trying to stop the witches of Benevento from destroying their farm while not finding themselves blamed for the mischief. In another, one of the book's lead characters aims to get to the bottom of who the Janara really is, and discovers that the culprit may live in his house.

In a way, Scarinzi has been on that same search for Janara, albeit in a more metaphorical way. She has even interviewed alleged practitioners, one, in fact, came to the anthropologist with some urgency, wanting to impart to her the formulas that she knew.

"Because she is convinced that if she dies, this world of magic will be lost," Scarinzi says.

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com



The Museum of Witches, located in the Palazzo Paolo V off the city's pedestrian Corso Garibaldi, is a testament to how the customs survive in the daily lives of its residents.

#HASRAT

The Love Story of Iqbal, Hasrat Jaipuri

Iqbal fell in love with a Hindu girl, Radha. She would often come to Jhakora of her home. And Iqbal would simply wait there



Iqbal, born in 1922 in Jaipur, came from a modest background. His early life was marked by a deep passion for poetry. Even as a young boy, Iqbal was known for his soulful expression through words, weaving emotions into his verses. His connection with poetry began to blossom in his teenage years, after he fell in love with Radha, Iqbal fell in love with a Hindu girl, Radha. She would often come to Jhakora of her home. And Iqbal would simply wait there. In their brief but intense relationship, Iqbal and Radha's love story faced enormous obstacles. They came from two vastly different cultural and religious backgrounds, Iqbal, a Muslim from a deeply spiritual and intellectual family, and Radha, a Hindu girl, rooted in the traditions of her people. At one point, he even worked as a bus conductor in Bombay (now Mumbai), hoping to find a better future.

The Big Break: 'Barsaat' and the Rise of Hasrat Jaipuri

Iqbal's first big break in Bollywood came when he was hired to write lyrics for the film *Barsaat* (1949), directed by Raj Kapoor. Raj Kapoor, impressed by Iqbal's work, entrusted him with several key songs for the film. This marked the beginning of a long and successful collaboration between Iqbal and Raj Kapoor.

The Move to Bombay and the Beginnings of a New Life

Iqbal moved to Bombay, like many young dreamers, hoping to make a name for himself in the bustling city of opportunities. However, his start was far from glamorous. As a bus conductor, Iqbal lived a life far removed from the world of glamour and poetry that he dreamed of. He wrote his pain of separation with Radha in his verses and poetry.

Iqbal's breakthrough came when his poetic skills were recognized at Mushairas in Bombay. His pen name, Hasrat Jaipuri, became known in the literary world. His eloquent verses and passionate delivery captured the attention of several influential people in the city,

including those from the world of cinema.

Meeting Prithviraj Kapoor and the First Steps into Bollywood

It was at one of these Mushairas that Iqbal's life took a significant turn. Prithviraj Kapoor, the legendary actor and father of Raj Kapoor, attended a Mushaira where Iqbal recited his poetry. Kapoor was deeply impressed by Iqbal's verses and invited him to explore opportunities in Bollywood. This was a turning point for Iqbal, and he began his journey into the world of film music.

The Iconic Song in 'Brahmachari'

As Iqbal's (Hasrat Jaipuri's) fame grew, he continued to collaborate with Raj Kapoor and other renowned composers. One of his most famous works came in 1968, with the iconic song 'Main nashe mein hoon,' from the film *Brahmachari*. The song, composed by Shankar Jaiskhan, was a playful yet emotionally charged piece, which became an anthem for many.

Iqbal's Legacy and the Influence of Love in His Lyrics

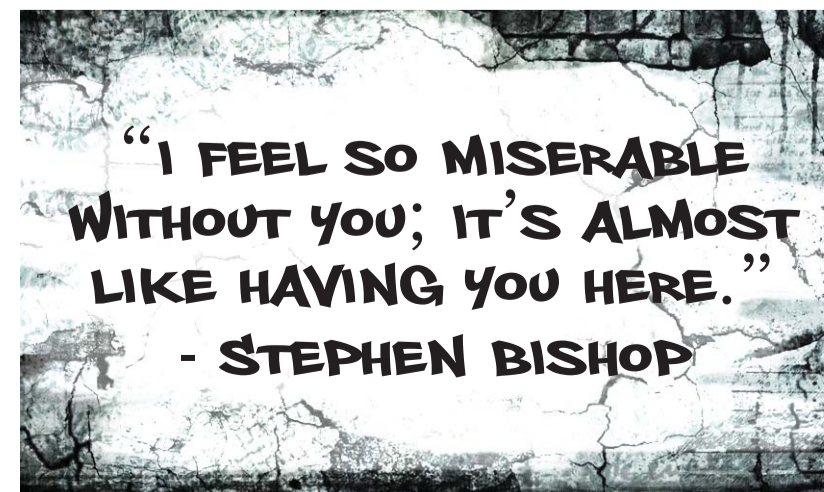
Despite his professional success, Iqbal's personal life remained marked by sacrifice and devotion. His love for poetry and music was the driving force of his life, and his lyrics became an outlet for his emotions.

Throughout his career, Hasrat Jaipuri's pen captured the essence of longing and love. His words became an expression of a romantic idealism that resonated with millions. His songs reflected a tender side of romance, often invoking themes of separation, yearning, and hope.



HASRAT JAIPURI
A Bus Conductor to A Great Lyricist

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS

