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Women and Demons in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in the Church of Espoo (Finland)

Katja Fält

Introduction

The aim of the article is primarily to examine late medieval wall paintings in the church of Espoo that include women with some form of diabolical entity.¹ The paintings under examination include five different motifs: the milking and churning, the Journey to Blåkulla, Skoella and Tutivillus. The milking scene in Espoo shows a woman with a cow and a man-size demon with horns, hoofs and a tail observing the task (Fig. 1). Immediately above the woman milking a cow another woman is seen riding on a broom, holding a pouch-like object in her left hand and a horn in her right (Figs. 1, 3). On the south side of the church, the milking scene continues with a scene representing a demon assisting women in churning the butter (Fig. 2). Skoella scene represents a demon passing a pair of shoes to a woman on the west wall above the entrance (Fig. 7), and above, three demons are seen twiddling with a parchment (Fig. 9). This motif is referred to as Tutivillus.

The analysis of the motifs begins with the examination of the images at their visual level in which the content of the images is explained. The analysis then proceeds to the examination of the motifs in their cultural and historical context. The article discusses the origin of the different motifs and compares them to similar ones found among other early sixteenth-century wall paintings in Finland. The methodological approach combines art historical analysis and cultural-historical contextualisation.

In research history the motifs of milking, churning, the Journey to Blåkulla, Tutivillus and Skoella have not been profoundly treated. Subjects with women and demons have mainly been briefly described in the context of the pictorial program of a specific church but the analysis of the images, their meaning and

¹ The article is based on a presentation held at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference in Manchester, January 2012.

context have mainly remained exiguous. In the 1930s² art historian Ludvig Wennervirta published a large part of the Finnish medieval wall paintings that were known at the time. Wennervirta presented an overview of the paintings and gave analyses on their meaning and artistic execution. He mentioned the motifs of milking, churning and the Journey to Blåkulla in Espoo church but did not offer any analysis of the paintings. He connects the motifs to primarily folk tales and legends.³ In general, Wennervirta was more interested in the overall style, stylistic development, and artistic influences of Finnish medieval wall paintings than in the profound analysis of different motifs.

Bengt Ingvar Kilström discussed the motif of the recording demon Tutivillus in an article in which he connected the painting depicting demons with parchment in Espoo church with that motif.⁴ He drew this conclusion from similar images in Swedish wall paintings depicting women gossiping in the church and from textual sources. He mainly analysed the motif as operating on a didactic level and warning against sin.⁵

In her 1986 dissertation Swedish Art historian Anna Nilsén aimed at compiling a systematic work on Swedish and Finnish late medieval wall paintings.⁶ She extensively catalogued the paintings in churches and then discussed the motifs based on their subsequent groups. Nilsén has included the Finnish examples of milking, churning and the Journey to Blåkulla, as well as Tutivillus and Skoella, in her analysis.⁷ She, in general, interpreted the motifs including demons as allegorical or realistic reminders of death, that also operate as examples of sins that will lead people to eternal damnation. She also acknowledged the textual background of the motifs and visual correspondences for them in other parts of Europe.⁸

Art historian Helena Edgren discussed the motif of Tutivillus and writing demons in an article in 1979 article and in her 1993 dissertation.⁹ She analysed the motifs depicting demons writing in Finnish medieval wall paintings and

² Ludvig Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkkoissa*, Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys: Helsinki 1930; *ibid.*, *Suomen keskiaikainen kirkkomaalaus*, WSOY: Helsinki 1937.

³ Wennervirta 1937, 106, 128, 220; Wennervirta 1930, 107.

⁴ Bengt Ingvar Kilström, 'Kring en djävulsscen i Esbo kyrka', *Finskt Museum* (1965), 77–80.

⁵ Kilström 1965, 78–79.

⁶ Anna Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kalkmåleri: Kyrkmålningar I Mälarlandskapen och Finland 1400-1534*, Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademie: Stockholm 1986.

⁷ Nilsén 1986, 422–426.

⁸ Nilsén 1986, 422–423.

⁹ Helena Edgren, 'De skrivande djävlarne i Finlands medeltida kyrkor', *Finskt Museum* (1979), 54–68; *ibid.*, *Mercy and Justice: Miracles of the Virgin Mary in Finnish Medieval Wall Paintings*, Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen Aikakauskirja 100, Helsinki 1993.

connected the majority of them to Tutivillus. In her dissertation she interpreted the motif of writing demons in the context of *acedia*, the state of listlessness, usually listed as one of the seven capital sins and often known as sloth. In her opinion, the story of Tutivillus was originally a longer story in a miracle of the Virgin Mary in which the Virgin tries to aid people who had fallen under the sin of *acedia*. According to Edgren, the story gradually devolved into a short exemplum that was used in sermons. Edgren also suggested that the motif might have been included in pictorial programs in Finland through the sermons of the Bridgettine brothers.¹⁰

Stephen A. Mitchell, anthropologist and a scholar in Scandinavian Studies, has aimed at analysing the motifs of milking, churning and the Journey to Blåkulla in the specific context of witchcraft.¹¹ In his work on witchcraft in the Nordic Countries, he has argued that these different motifs are part of a widespread belief-system addressing and visualising the concept of the 'milk-stealing witch'.¹² Mitchell has connected the images as part of the ecclesiastic attempt to promote certain ideas via visual means. According to Mitchell such images projected and visualised views about witches and witchcraft to parishioners from a gendered perspective.¹³ According to Mitchell the topic of witchcraft in the late medieval Nordic world was essentially gendered by the legal authorities and it had to do with how 'maleness' and 'femaleness' were constructed in the late medieval northern thought.¹⁴

All the motifs discussed, milking, churning, the Journey to Blåkulla, Skoella and Tutivillus have mainly been treated separately in the previous

¹⁰ Edgren 1993, 140–141.

¹¹ Stephen A Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 2011.

¹² Mitchell 2010, 138–139.

¹³ Mitchell 2011, 125.

¹⁴ Mitchell 2011, 197, 199. There is a growing body of research from the 1970s onwards focusing on gender in witchcraft studies. See central works on the role and women and gender in the context of the witchcraft discourse: Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God. The Witch-hunt in Scotland*, Chatto & Windus: London 1981; *ibid.*, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, ed. Alan Macfarlane, Basil Blackwell: New York 1984; Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, The Feminist Press: New York 2010; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, repr. Routledge: London 1997; Elspeth Whitney, 'The Witch "She"/The Historian "He"', in Brian P. Levack ed., *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: Volume IV, Gendering and Witchcraft*, Routledge: New York 2001, 15–39; Diane Purkiss, 'Women's stories of witchcraft in Early Modern England: The House, the Body, the Child', in Levack ed. 2001, 408–432; Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*, Pandora: London 1994; Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 2002; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 2003; Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200–1500*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 2012.

studies. In this article, I will acknowledge the interpretations and analyses made in the research history but aim at a more profound analysis of the role and the function of the paintings in a religious context. Previous research therefore operates as the starting-point of the analysis of which the identification of the motifs is based on. The aim of the article is to look at the images depicting women and demons in one specific church, that of Espoo, and to analyse their content and meaning in the ecclesiastic environment. I will first present the material and examine the ways women and demons are portrayed in the wall paintings. The motifs representing milking, churning and the Journey to Blåkulla have been connected to the visual construction of the concept of the 'witch' especially by Mitchell, while Skoella and Tutivillus can be connected to the dangers of illicit speech and recording sins.

The analysis is thus twofold: the examination of the milking, churning and the Journey to Blåkulla is focused on the manner these images have been interpreted as projecting views about witchcraft and the role of gender in it. In this article, gender is primarily understood as a structure of social roles, connected to the construction of and maintaining social roles in the society. This follows Mitchell's argument how the concept of the 'witch' was connected to the construction of certain type of 'femaleness'.¹⁵ The article also aims at placing the images in a broader context of social control and seeks to examine whether the paintings can be regarded as aiming specifically women, as enforcing stereotypical social roles set for women.

The other part of the analyses focuses on the motifs of Skoella and Tutivillus. The aim is to unearth some of the associations in the images connecting women's speech and the diabolic. The article argues that these paintings aim at enforcing gendered notions about the 'nature' of women, as particularly prone to diabolic influence. Skoella and Tutivillus have a somewhat different emphasis: Skoella implicates the dangers of malicious speech while Tutivillus represents the attempt to control illicit speech. These images are equally placed in a broader context of social control that aims at draw connection between sinful actions and gender, representing certain type of speech as feminised. What is common to all the motifs discussed in the article is that they all can be seen as a part of social control that aims at emphasising how certain type of activity can be coded primarily feminine and hence it is regarded as 'sinful' or transgressive. These images and the ideas they embody do not necessarily represent actual, lived realities. Rather, they operate on an

¹⁵ Mitchell 2011, 197, 199.

associative, idea-level, making visible some of the notions connected to the role of gender in medieval society.

Early sixteenth-century wall paintings in Espoo church

The late medieval stone church of Espoo (county of Uusimaa), situated on the south-coast close to the current-day capital of Finland, Helsinki, displays a wealth of medieval wall paintings executed around the 1510s by a group of painters that has remained anonymous. The church was among the churches built at the turn of the sixteenth century. In Finland, the systematic construction of stone churches commenced from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. The first medieval stone churches were built in the latter part of the thirteenth century and the construction of stone churches continued until the mid-sixteenth century. Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden during the Middle Ages and formed an independent diocese, the Diocese of Turku within the church province of Uppsala, with the episcopal seat in the capital town of Turku. The bishop of Turku was the highest ecclesiastic authority in medieval Finland. The Diocese consisted of smaller independent parochial units, parishes. Parishes typically needed to uphold a church, a vicarage and a vicar. By the end of the Middle Ages, there were around hundred parishes in Finland.¹⁶

Espoo became an independent parish possibly around 1350s and the first church built was most likely a wooden one.¹⁷ The parish of Espoo erected its first stone church between 1485 and 1490.¹⁸ The planning and construction of stone churches was controlled in the diocesan level and the most vibrant era of constructing stone churches was from the 1430s onwards to the late fifteenth century. The initiative to build a stone church often came from the parish that was usually the main financier of the project. A Finnish medieval stone church typically consisted of a rectangular nave, a porch, and a sacristy. In Espoo the medieval parts of the stone church still existing are the western and eastern parts of the nave. The porch and sacristy have been taken down in the early nineteenth century and the medieval nave was altered into a cross-shape between 1821 and 1823.¹⁹

¹⁶ Kauko Pirinen, *Suomen kirkon historia 1: Keskiäika ja uskonpuhdistuksen aika*, WSOY: Porvoo, Helsinki, Juva 1991, 154–157.

¹⁷ Markus Hiekkänen, *Suomen kivikirkot keskiajalla*, Otava: Helsinki 2003; *ibid.*, *Suomen keskiajan kivikirkot*, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 2007, 428.

¹⁸ Markus Hiekkänen, *The Stone Churches of the Medieval Diocese of Turku. A Systematic Classification and Chronology*, Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 101, Helsinki 1994, 215, 218–219.

¹⁹ Hiekkänen 2007, 428–429;



Fig. 1. Espoo Church, milking scene with a Journey to Blåkulla. Photo: Katja Fält.

The interior walls of the church were decorated with consecration crosses during the construction phase in the late fifteenth century. The walls and vaults were more extensively painted presumably after the vaulting of the church was finished in the 1510s.²⁰ There is no information concerning the group of painters who were responsible for the work but based on stylistic similarities, the group seemed to have executed wall paintings in other early sixteenth-century churches of Southern Finland, in Siuntio, Inkoo and in the Franciscan convent church in Rauma, the latter being situated in the south-west coast of Finland. The painters

²⁰ Hiekkänen 1994, 215, 218–219; Hiekkänen 2007, 429–431; Wennervirta 1937, 124–128. Tove Riska, 'Keskiajan maalaustaide', *ARS Suomen taide 1*, W & G: Keuruu 1987, 116–181, here 163–167.

were most likely a group of so-called professional painters who had some form of formal and practical training in painting. The evaluation of the paintings in Espoo in their medieval state is challenging since during the early nineteenth-century alteration work of the church, six central vaults were taken down. The existing paintings are only visible in the walls and vaults of the eastern and western part of the medieval nave.



Fig. 2. Espoo Church, churning scene. Photo: Katja Fält.

The pictorial schema of the paintings emphasises the Passion history of Jesus that has been painted in the walls around the nave. Representation of saints and

scenes from the Old Testament have been painted in the vaults. The visual narrative inside the church aims at representing the salvation history of mankind, beginning from the Creation and ending at Last Judgement in the nave. In the chancel area the motifs focus on the birth and childhood of Jesus, depicting the Nativity, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Adoration of the Magi. In the back of the church, in the western part of the nave, the events from the life of Christ continue, with the motifs representing actions leading to his destiny as the saviour of humankind, and finally to crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

Secular motifs such as those including various scenes with women and demons, have mainly been painted in the western part of the nave. In the fourth vault of the north aisle the milking and churning scenes depict demons assisting women in their task. The Journey to Blåkulla has been painted above the scene of milking. Skoella has been painted around the west wall window and above the west wall the motif Tutivillus represents three demons stretching a parchment. Images representing diabolical beings are no means extraordinary in late medieval wall paintings in Finland, nor in the Nordic countries but they only became more common in the late medieval era.²¹ Diabolical (from Latin *diabolus*) refers in a religious context to some form of a personified evil being or malign spirit and is here understood as relating to such an evil being, or embodying characteristics of such a being. The first images showing women and demons among Finnish medieval wall paintings can be dated to the 1470s while the majority of demon motifs are in the early sixteenth-century churches.

Women's work and malign beings

In medieval rural Finland dairy production was in the hands of women.²² This daily task seems to be depicted in the fourth vault of the north aisle of Espoo. A milking scene in Espoo shows a woman with a cow and a man-size demon with horns, hoofs and a tail observing the task. Immediately above the woman milking a cow another woman is seen riding on an object resembling a broom, holding a pouch-like object in her left hand and a horn in her right.²³ The demon

²¹ Similar motifs frequent in Swedish and Danish medieval paintings. Jan Wall, *Tjuvmölkande väsen 1. Äldre nordisk tradition*, Studia Ethnologica Upsaliensis 3, Uppsala 1977; *ibid.*, *Tjuvmölkande väsen 2. Yngre nordisk tradition*, Studia Ethnologica Upsaliensis 5, Uppsala 1978; Edgren 1979; Nilsén 1986; Ebbe Nyborg, *Fanden på Vaeggen*, Herning 1978.

²² For the division of labour, see for example Raisa Maria Toivo, *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Society: Finland and the Wider European Experience*, Ashgate: Aldershot 2008, 128–136.

²³ In some of the Swedish images of Blåkulla the devil welcoming women hands them a drinking horn.

depicted in the milking scene seems to be pointing with his left hand at the woman (Fig. 1, 3). On the south side of the church, the milking scene continues with a scene representing a demon assisting women in churning the butter (Fig. 2). Here, the central motif is the churn. On its right side a bare-footed woman with long hair, a headdress, a long skirt and an apron, is seen churning, and on the left side a smiling demon with horns, hoofs and a tail is assisting the woman by holding the plunger. The large butter tops rest on a wooden tripod container and five more butter tops are seen above the woman and the demon. There are also two small animals drinking from or spitting to bowls.



Fig. 3. Espoo Church, Journey to Blåkulla. Photo: Katja Fält.

The presence of the diabolic associated with women in these motifs converts innocent household tasks into not so innocent ones. The presence of the diabolic in the paintings is what first and foremost gives away that the scenes are dealing with some form of questionable action. Rather, they seem to indicate that some kind of social codes are being breached. In this case, the breaching seems to point to the direction of stealing. The act of stealing is not necessarily evident in the image but implied in a more subdued manner, by placing an animal responsible for the act of stealing in the image. In Finland the animal has been known as

para.²⁴ It is often unspecified in appearance but in both literal and visual rendering it tends to be regarded as a hare, or a cat. In another early sixteenth-century painting in Lohja church, the *para* is seen drinking from a bowl in the scene of milking (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Porch of Kalanti Church, milking and churning. Photo: Heikki Hanka

The notion that some kind of a supernatural object was being used in stealing has a literary tradition of its own and it appears in medieval collections of sermon *exempla*. *Exempla* can be defined as short, illustrative stories the clergy could use in order to clarify doctrinal points in sermons. A notable collection of exempla is Frederic Tubach's *Index Exemplorum* which catalogues 5400 exempla found in 37 central collection of medieval tales. In the fourteenth-century Middle-English devotional work *Handlyn Synne* by Robert Manning of Brunne a supernatural object used for stealing milk is mentioned. In this case, the object is a bewitched cow-sucking bag in which it was possible to gather milk stolen from her neighbours.²⁵ The same phenomenon, collecting milk with the aid of sack-like

²⁴ Wall 1977, 58, 62–71; Wall 1978, 13–14, 58–61; Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, ed. Gregory Elliot, Hutchinson Radius: London etc. 1990, 300.

²⁵ The bag is generally described as a leather bag in which it was possible to gather milk. Christine Marie Neufeld, *Xanthippe's Sisters: Orality and Femininity in the Later Middle Ages*, Unpublished PhD dissertation,

bodies, is mentioned in *Homo conditus*, a collection of sermon exempla by a Swedish theologian Magister Mathias in the mid-fourteenth century.²⁶ The story is also catalogued in *Index Exemplorum* as a 'Witch with cow-milking bag'.²⁷ Supernatural assistance emphasises how the milking is done with outside help, in this case using a supernatural creature that steals the milk and then throws it up into the bowl.

The churning was itself associated with magic since butter was used as a base in medical and magical recipes; the production of butter from milk was seen as a sensitive process, magical in itself, and its success could be threatened by the interference of evil spirits.²⁸ In eleventh-century canon law, in the *Decreta* by Burchard of Worms we find a reference to the theft of milk by supernatural means:²⁹

Have you done what certain women have been in the habit of doing and who believe that with the help of the devil they can take from their neighbour's overabundance of milk and honey and use them for themselves, for their animals or for whomever they want?

Stephen A. Mitchell has argued that the appearance of the topos of a magical or supernatural theft in the works of learned clergymen has both continental and Nordic roots.³⁰

McGill University 2001, 206, http://digitool.Library.McGill.CA:80/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=38251&ilo_library=GEN01, retrieved in 17.3.2017; Robert Manning, William de Waddington, and Frederick James Furnivall, *Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne and its French Original*, Repr. Kraus Reprint: Millwood, NY, 1973, lines 501–568.

²⁶ Wall 1977, 74–79, 85–89; Mitchell 2011, 138.

²⁷ Frederic C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales*, Suomalainen tiedeakatemia: Helsinki 1969, no 5327.

²⁸ Ruth Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons. The Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes*, Ruth Mellinkoff: Los Angeles, CA, 2005, 161–163; Ana Maria Gruia, 'Fools, Devils, and Alchemy: Secular Images in the Monastery', *Studia Patzinaka* 6 (2008), 129–145, here 136.

²⁹ 'Burchardi Wormaciensis Ecclesiae Episcopi Decretorum Libri viginti', ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia latina* 140, Paris 1880, XIX.5, col. 973B–C: 'Fecisti quod quaedam mulieres facere solent et firmiter credunt, ita dico, ut si vicinus ejus lacte vel apibus abundaret, omnem abundantiam lactis et mellis, quam suus vicinus ante se habere visus est, ad se et sua animalia vel ad quos voluerint, a diabolo adjunctae suis fascinationibus et incantationibus se posse convertere credant?'; my translation. Wall 1977, 72–73; Mitchell 2011, 136–145, whose translation of the passage at 138.

³⁰ Mitchell 2011, 138–140.



Fig. 5. Porch of Kalanti Church, Journey to Blåkulla. Photo: Heikki Hanka

In a rural context, theft would have signified the breaching of social codes. A peasant household was regarded as a unit in which the work done benefited the common good. In such a context, the interference of something deemed malevolent might have had serious consequences.³¹ The demonic being in the images of milking and churching brings an ominous aspect to the tasks which is underlined by the paradigmatic relationship between the women and demons. Yet another supernatural element is implied in the milking scene by placing a woman with a broom above it, as if flying. In Nordic medieval wall paintings motifs representing women flying on brooms, sometimes with demons, usually represent the myth of the 'Journey to Blåkulla'. In another late fifteenth-century representation of the Blåkulla in the porch of Kalanti church, a woman is seen

³¹ Toivo 2008, 126.

riding on the broom with a demon (Fig. 5). Another, large demon standing on a mountain undoubtedly representing Blåkulla, is also shown in the image.



Fig. 6. Lohja Church, milking and churning. Photo Heikki Hanka

In the Nordic context the central tenet of the myth is that some women travel (usually by flying) to a location called Blåkulla, Blaakolden, or Bloksberg, (or Kyöpelinvuori in Finnish), that is often conceived as a mountain in a distant country or an island.³² The Blåkulla stories embody elements of otherworldly travel. Carlo Ginzburg has related the myth to old shamanistic traditions emanating originally from a Eurasian substratum, characterised by the production of an ecstatic state in which persons visualised themselves as making magical journeys through the air to secure powers of healing, or to fight hostile beings.³³ In the early fifteenth-century Nordic accounts Blåkulla is mainly a general site of peril.³⁴ Generally, Blåkulla has been connected to the notion of the witches' sabbath which was a saturnalian feast in honour the devil, in which

³² Charles Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons. Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Brill: Leiden and Boston 2003, 293–299.

³³ Ginzburg 1990, 136, 212–217; Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew J. Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors and Gossip*, Cambridge University Press: New York 2004, 141.

³⁴ Mitchell 2011, 125–126.

women made an oral, or even physical pact with the devil.³⁵ It was the antithesis to an ordered society and accepted behaviour.³⁶ In the Nordic context the sabbath scenario appears already around 1300. The concept of a diabolic pact became an important form of shared discourse, a European-wide metaphoric language that implied images of humans as agents of the devil. Also, it stresses the association of organised diabolic activity especially with females.³⁷

Mitchell has argued that these different motifs, milking, churning and the Journey to Blåkulla are part of a wide-spread belief-system addressing and visualising the concept of the 'milk-stealing witch'.³⁸ This myth consists of various parts that include elements perceived as 'magical' in one way or another. In the European context, images showing women and demons or targeting women as prone to the tempting of demons, were part of the construction of the image of a 'witch'. For example the concept of the 'flying witch' was an essential part in the iconography of witchcraft. According to Charles Zika, the construction of the iconography of the 'witch' in visual representations from the late fifteenth century onwards positioned notions of gender and sexuality within the framework of witchcraft.³⁹ Witchcraft activities were generally associated with sexuality and with female sexuality in particular. This had to do with the fear of female sexuality and the fear of females threatening the society.

The churning and Journey to Blåkulla both gesture towards sexuality or a sexual relationship between the women and demons. In Espoo the demon's tail is protruding in a somewhat phallic manner in both the milking and churning images but especially in the churning. In some Western European images the churning has a strong sexual innuendo and it has sometimes been suggested that pounding could be an analogue for penetration.⁴⁰ In the porch of Lohja church, a painting depicting women milking and churning shows two devils in somewhat erectile positions (Fig. 6). No sexual organs are visible and the other demon seems to be in fact holding some kind of a bottle in front of him, but the devils' insinuating postures and placement of the hands seems to suggest that the relationship between women and devils is deemed carnal.⁴¹ The sexual innuendo

³⁵ Toivo 2008, 60–61; Mitchell 2011, 118–125.

³⁶ Per Sörlin, 'Child Witches and the Construction of the Witches' Sabbath: The Swedish Blåkulla Story', in Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs with Eszter Csonka-Takács (eds), *Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions*, Central European University Press: New York 2008, 99–124, here 102.

³⁷ Mitchell 2011, 203.

³⁸ Mitchell 2010, 138–139.

³⁹ Zika 2003, 10–13.

⁴⁰ Gruia 2008, 140.

⁴¹ According to Nilsén, such images have a 'pornographic tone' that can arouse a sense of humour in the viewers. Nilsén 1986, 424.

seems to emphasise the paradigmatic nature of the relationship between women and demons. Intercourse with the demon was often perceived as physical; women had sex with the demon, thus paving their way to become witches. This discourse seems to be underlined by the painting representing women riding a broom above the scene with a demon and a milking woman. The broom in the images of flying can be interpreted as phallic, thus adding sexual symbolism.⁴² There was also the association between riding and uncontrolled sexuality. According to Zika, riding in late medieval visual representations was also associated with various human vices such as lust.⁴³

The discourse on witchcraft as a form of magic began to be elaborated from the mid-fifteenth-century onwards, and at the same time the image of the 'witch' in visual culture started to become more widespread.⁴⁴ Important developments and conceptualisations of witchcraft had already been ongoing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴⁵ Witchcraft in the Middle Ages has attracted scholars for decades but the actual definition of the term witchcraft in the medieval context is highly elusive.⁴⁶ Witchcraft can be understood as a belief system, a worldview, or a way of thinking. Jeffrey Burton Russel has defined witchcraft as a human perception that has varied widely. He has placed it between the realms of religion and a 'magical world view'.⁴⁷ Magic had many forms in the Middle Ages, and was sometimes understood as an independent world view. According to Burton Russel a homocentric worldview is at the core of magical beliefs. Human actions could affect everything in the natural world, therefore magic was an act of manipulation.⁴⁸

⁴² Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, Longman: London and New York 1995, 49.

⁴³ Zika 2003, 293–299.

⁴⁴ Zika 2003, 10, 293.

⁴⁵ Mitchell 2011, 9–10.

⁴⁶ The purpose of the article is not to give an extensive overview of the historiography on witchcraft studies, or to examine historical context of witchcraft in medieval Finland. For the latter, see especially Nenonen – Kervinen 1994 Nenonen 1995; Eilola 2003; Toivo 2008, 2013; Toivo – Nenonen 2013.

⁴⁷ Magic has often been divided into two categories: 'high' and 'low', or 'natural' and 'demonic'. The so-called 'low magic' was mainly practical, everyday involving superstitions of the ordinary people while the so-called 'high magic' involved notions of the pact with the devil, the sabbath and apostasy. Especially from the church's point of view magic was an unorthodox practice that exploited the powers of demons. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, and London 1972, 4–6, 41, 11–13; Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1989, 9–11; Levack 1995, 7; Marko Nenonen and Raisa Maria Toivo, 'Challenging the Paradigm of Witch-Hunt Historiography', in Raisa Maria Toivo and Marko Nenonen (eds), *Writing Witch-Hunt Histories*, Brill: Leiden and Boston 2013, 1–16, here 6; Catherine Rider, 'Magic and Unorthodoxy in Late Medieval English Pastoral Manuals', in Sophie Page ed., *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain*, Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York 2010, 96–114, here 96.

⁴⁸ Burton Russell 1972, 5–6, 11–13.

Mitchell has argued that the notion of witchcraft was connected to the effectiveness of the source of power. The church's thinking about witchcraft mainly involved the ability to manipulate power that was based on the innate qualities of an individual, on acquired learning or on bargaining with some form of 'evil forces'. Practitioner of some form of 'magic' aimed at commanding and manipulating power. On the contrary, a religious person was merely a supplicant praying to the source of power. In this sense, acts regarded as forms of witchcraft can be understood as dynamic.⁴⁹ In the core of the conceptualisation of witchcraft is the notion of the presence of some form of tension or unexplained phenomenon and the ways these were directed into certain channels.⁵⁰ Therefore, the notion of witchcraft is not a fixed entity but rather derives from behaviour regarded as acts of witchcraft. Beliefs and practices connected to the notions of witchcraft were also not immutable or unified, rather they varied and mutated over time.⁵¹

The concept of witchcraft seems to combine vernacular belief systems and church doctrines.⁵² There is some information from medieval Finland about witchcraft and legal actions connected to it. The provincial church assembly held at Arboga, Sweden in 1412 with several resolutions of ecclesiastic jurisdiction, imposed a penalty for those who practiced prognostications, witchcraft, interpretation of dreams, 'signing', or other such superstition.⁵³ 'Signing' could refer to the making of marks, perhaps runic marks or something similar, used in connection to spells and incantations. There is also local evidence from medieval Finland that seems to imply a connection between theft and witchcraft. In 1526 Anna Olufsdotter was sentenced to death for theft and for practicing witchcraft (*truldom och tiwfferij*). She was released when her son had paid 3 marks that he got after selling three ells of land.⁵⁴ It is not known what she might have stolen and whether this happened with the help of witchcraft.

Some scholars have noted that definition of witch in itself does not exclude males.⁵⁵ Men could be tried as witches too. Although traditionally women have been perceived as main targets of witchcraft accusation, in the eastern parts of

⁴⁹ Mitchell 2011, 11–14.

⁵⁰ Mitchell 2011, 6.

⁵¹ Mitchell 2011, 13–14.

⁵² Mitchell 2011, ix.

⁵³ *Finlands medeltidsurkunder* (hereafter *FMU*), Reinhold Hausen ed., 8 vols., Helsingfors 1910–1935, no. 1381 (with a modern abstract only). Original printed in *Statuta synodalia veteris ecclesiae sveogothicae*, ed. Henrik Reuterdaahl, Lund 1841, 106.

⁵⁴ *FMU* 6294.

⁵⁵ Levack 1995, 135; Willem de Blécourt, 'The Making of the Female Witch: Reflections on Witchcraft and Gender in the Early Modern Period', *Gender & History* 12 (2000), 287–309, here 294.

Europe the majority on witches were male. In sixteenth-century Finland the person accused and convicted of witchcraft was in the majority of cases a male. When women were condemned the reason was not primarily their sex but an act perceived as witchcraft. Witchcraft accusations also mainly concerned peasant farmers and their wives.⁵⁶ Incidents of witches' sabbath seem to have been rare and form a small minority of all witch trials in Finland.⁵⁷ In the medieval Finland people were very seldom accused of any kind of sabbath activities and when they were these accusations took place mainly from the seventeenth century onwards. Early modern examples of sabbath trials in Finland do seem to emphasise the role of women as those who were being accused. In the late seventeenth-century trials almost all the accused in the sabbath trials were women. According to Toivo, the sometimes pronounced role of the sabbath trials may be more of a cultural construct and not primarily based on actuality.⁵⁸

The paintings in Espoo may embody elements of forms of behaviour, understood as reflecting certain beliefs. These beliefs were about practices regarded as witchcraft. In the centre of it is certain type of behaviour, often some kind of opposition to obedience.⁵⁹ Women who were engaged in questionable activity involving demonic beings threatened divinely ordained social order and were seen in a negative light. But the images can be understood as containing more complex meanings than mere warnings about witchcraft. The myths about women assisting demons, the magical theft and the Journey to Blåkulla were ostensive narratives that both explained life's dark events and offered solutions to them. They had a strong explanatory and psychological power. They can be connected to a world view in which everything was logically connected in a chain of causation; if bad things happen in the community, then such things were being caused by someone (a demon, a witch, etc.) A motif depicting women stealing milk from their neighbours and then churning it into butter while the demons are eagerly assisting, undoubtedly worked well in the agricultural context where any misfortune in livelihood could have thrown people into peril. In a sense this motif also emphasises the active role of women and the

⁵⁶ Toivo 2013, 87; Jari Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla: Sallitun ja kielletyn määrittelemisen 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskon noituus- ja taikuustapauksissa*, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 2003.

⁵⁷ Toivo 2008, 60.

⁵⁸ Marko Nenonen, 'Noituus ja Idän mies. Noitavainojen erityisluonne Viipurin Karjalassa', in Kimmo Katajala ed., *Manaajista maalaisateliin. Tulkintoja toisesta historian, antropologian ja maantieteen välimaastossa*, Finnish Literature Society: Helsinki 1995, 131–162; Raisa Maria Toivo, 'Gender, Sex and Cultures of Trouble in Witchcraft Studies: European Historiography with Special Reference to Finland' in Toivo and Nenonen (eds) 2013, 87–108, here 95.

⁵⁹ Mitchell 2011, 14–15, 180.

uncertainties they had to face when attempting to keep their households running. Women using magic in domestic work and cattle raising were more eagerly called to account but the information mainly concerns post-medieval era. Ann Barstow, writing about women who were more often than men accused of witchcraft activities, reminds that women who used herbs for healing, delivered babies or performed abortions, predicted the future, cursed others or removed curses, and could make peace between neighbours, were vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. Such women also carried out functions that 'overlapped dangerously with the priest's job'.⁶⁰ Such women may have exerted a certain amount of informal power which may have been regarded disquieting.

According to Willem de Blécourt, witchcraft (in early modern Europe) could have been used as a convincing explanation of misfortune. People were dependent on communal values and neighbours for assistance. Women were generally in charge of the processes of production and reproduction in the household and thus more involved in (interpersonal behaviour) and neighbourly conflict.⁶¹ Toivo has noted how the survival of a community was 'dependent on order that required constant reproduction in an individual's personal behaviour, appearance and dealings with other people'. She has argued elsewhere that the witch discourse reveals the grounds on which women created their identities. These varying identities embodied a risk of failure, milk failed to turn into butter and sexuality was deemed illicit. Things vital to survival disappearing or failing might have proven harmful to the whole community.⁶² The same applied to attempts to individual gain and profit that were regarded as selfish deeds that did not profit the whole community. Such acts could have been regarded as serious social blunders on a communal level. The 'witch' provided an explanation for the failures and uncertainties.⁶³

Further, these images have to do with power and the social roles of women. According to Toivo, witchcraft is about power, especially in the context of women's status.⁶⁴ From the church's point of view, women were especially prone to the tempting of the devil because in the biblical sense, they were the descendants of Eve who had fallen to the seduction of the evil at Paradise. The

⁶⁰ Barstow 1994, 109; Stewart and Strathern 2004, 142; Marko Nenonen and Timo Kervinen, *Synnin palkka on kuolema. Suomalaiset noidat ja noitavainot 1500-1700 –luvulla*, Otava: Helsinki 1994, 235–236, 247; Toivo 2013, 99.

⁶¹ Blécourt 2000, 303.

⁶² Blécourt 2000, 299–300.

⁶³ Raisa Maria Toivo, *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Society. Finland and the Wider European Experience*, Ashgate: Aldershot 2008, 6, 13, 98.

⁶⁴ Toivo 2008, 9–11.

role of the female witch was therefore something very opposite to the stereotypical good wife, a role women were assumed to follow. Louise Jackson has stated that the witch used her own power and sexuality independently and free from male control and therefore did not follow the traditional roles for women.⁶⁵ The role of a 'witch' was part of an identity construction, an image against which women were persuaded to reflect and judge their own behaviours.



Fig. 7. Espoo church, Skoella. Photo: Katja Fält.

Sowing the seeds of discord - The demon and the old woman

Mitchell has argued that, conversely, the concept of a 'witch' could also be connected to a notion of 'a supernaturally empowered female figure'.⁶⁶ Women regarded as witches, as well as the women in these pictorial representations were active, they *stole* food, they *caused* disruption; in general, they had more freedom than perhaps the ordinary women. In these stories the witches and other unruly women were active agents. In a world dominated by men and a male legal system women that exerted a certain amount of freedom in their actions were often regarded as evil or unruly women, and their behaviour was something to

⁶⁵ Louise Jackson, 'Witches, Wives and Mothers: Witchcraft Persecution and Women's Confessions in Seventeenth-Century England', *Women's History Review*, 4 (1995), 63–84, here 71–72; Blécourt 2000, 291.

⁶⁶ Mitchell 2011, 191.

be condemned. This is obvious in yet another scene in Espoo. A large painting around the west wall window and above the west wall entrance shows a grinning demon with horns, a tail and faces in his belly and knees extending a long pole that curves along and around the window. On the other, left side of the window a woman is shown standing with bare feet and taking a pair of shoes that have been attached at the end of the demon's pole (Fig. 7).

This scene is a visualisation of the story of Skoella, that is, Shoe-Ella, also known as Kitta Grå, Titta Grå or Elin. The scene is depicted in another church as well, namely Siuntio, painted by the same workshop as in Espoo (Fig. 8). The roots of the story may stretch back to the thirteenth century, and it is a Nordic particularisation of the international story of the *Old Woman as Troublemaker*, that was widely used as a sermon *exemplum* in different parts of Europe.⁶⁷ It was also a popular Shrovetide drama.⁶⁸ According to the story the Devil sought to break up a married couple but did not succeed. One day he met an old woman who promised to help him. The Devil promised her a pair of shoes if she succeeded. The old woman went to a wife and said that her husband was unfaithful but if the wife cut off few hairs from his beard while he was sleeping, she would gain back his love. After having said this, the old woman went to the husband and said that his wife was unfaithful and planned to cut his throat while he was sleeping. She instructed the husband to stay awake. During the night the wife then tried to cut off few hairs from her husband's beard but the husband was awake and struck her dead. Thus the old woman had succeeded and received the shoes from the Devil. But the Devil had such a respect for the old woman's malice that he did not have the courage to give the shoes to her directly but handed them over by a long pole.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ In *Index exemplorum* the story is known as Old woman sows discord. The story is known, for example, in Spanish, French and German collections of *exempla*. Tubach 1969, no. 5361.

⁶⁸ Kerstin Rodin, 'Onda kvinnor och oregerliga hustrur. En etnologisk studie av kontroversiella kvinnobilder', *Studia Ethnologica Upsaliensia* 13, Uppsala 1984, 29–31.

⁶⁹ Wilhelm Aurell, 'Sagan om Kitta Grå', *Svenska Familj-Journalen* 16 (1877), 255; John Lindow, *Swedish Legends and Folktales*, University of California Press: Berkley, CA, etc. 1978, 174–176; Mitchell 2011, 136–138.



Fig. 8. Siuntio Church, Skoella and a devil. Photo: Katja Fält.

Skoella is thus a representation of a woman so frightful that even the devil himself was afraid of her. She was 'the woman who was worse than the devil'. The motif is thus connected to the biblical topos of the mythical evilness of women, the evilness being a quality in women that stretched again back to Eve. Skoella can also be understood as a *vetula*, the figure of a tale-telling bawd usually portrayed as an elderly woman. The context of the actions of a *vetula* is often comic in essence, yet she tends to be represented in a negative manner.⁷⁰ In the Skoella story the old woman is the transmitter of the poisonous attempts of the devil; she is the devil's proxy. Thus the image also relates to attitudes directed to women and especially to old women. According to Jan Ziolkowski, the distrust of men towards older women in part rested on lack of control: older women had much more freedom to move about than younger women. They could for example spread news which other women also relied on the news carried by the

⁷⁰ For example Karen Pratt, 'De vetula: The Figure of the Old Woman in Medieval French Literature', Albrecht Classen ed., *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin and New York 2007, 321–342, here 321.

older women but men could see them merely carrying scandal and gossip. Thus, older women had power in terms of speech and mobility.⁷¹ However, the Skoella story does not represent her mobility and speech in a positive way but in negative, maleficent manner.



Fig. 9. Espoo Church, Tutivillus. Photo: Katja Fält.

The story of Skoella combines the distrust towards old women and the evils of slander, gossip and loose talk in a moralising way and connects Skoella to the topos of the maleficent hag.⁷² It reveals how words could function as incitement to sin and how that incitement can bring harm to others. The harm is to the hearer but the moral character of the evil-speaker, Skoella, is revealed through the words.⁷³ The motif relates to the notion of the susceptibility of women to gossip and slander, perceived as ultimately demonically inspired.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Jan Ziolkowski, 'The Obscenities of Old Women. Vetularity and Vernacularity', in *ibid.* ed., *Obscenity. Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, Brill: Leiden etc. 1998, 73–89, here 81–89.

⁷² Neufeld 2001, 157.

⁷³ Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Lencherous Songys. Medieval Sexuality in Word and Deed', in Ziolkowski ed. 1998, 234–245, here 241.

⁷⁴ Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues. Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 2006, 46.

Speech was essential in forming a community but what concerned the authorities was the negative side of speech, rumours and gossip that could be used as a weapon against others and as a means of self-advancement. Rumours and gossip are often crucially involved in the genesis of overt violence in communal settings. Rumours express the fluidity and ambiguity of information in situations of conflict and crisis.⁷⁵ Uncontrolled, subversive speech threatened order, control and hierarchy. In small communities such as Espoo, spreading slanderous calumnies about neighbours could have had serious, even irreversible consequences, as the Skoella story so vividly demonstrates. Thus, rumours could threaten both secular and sacred order and the whole community. Mitchell has argued that the scene's frequent placement around the door functioned as a final warning about proper behaviour to the parishioners, especially women, before leaving the church: discord born of slander, meddling and gossip were the works of the devil.⁷⁶ Whether aimed at both sexes or specifically at women, the motif nevertheless deploys a gendered strategy by showing a woman as an agent of the devil. In its essence it also reminded how words could kill and result to the eternal death of the soul.

'Let women keep silence in the churches'⁷⁷ - Demons and idle talk

The negative power of speech is implied in the motif representing the demon Tutivillus. There seem to be two ways to bring forth warnings against idle gossip in the church; either by showing a demon or demons writing on a parchment or representing a demon inducing women - or occasionally men - to chatter during the mass. The two ways are most likely related to the same story. In Espoo a scene painted in the vault high above the west wall door depicts the first case as three demons are seen stretching a parchment with their teeth and writing on it (Fig. 9). The scene has been connected to the story of Tutivillus.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Stewart and Strathern 2004, 202.

⁷⁶ Mitchell 2010, 137.

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:35, quoted after Swift Edgar and Angela M. Kinney (eds), *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims translation*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2010.

⁷⁸ Kilström 1965, 77–80; Edgren 1979, 54–55.



Fig. 10. Siuntio Church, Tutivillus. Photo: Katja Fält.

The name Tutivillus or Titivillus first appears in *Tractatus de Penitentia* by thirteenth-century Franciscan theologian Johannes Guallensis (John of Wales) from c. 1285, although it depends on an earlier source.⁷⁹ The Tutivillus-story has two different narrative traditions of which one was devoted to the recording demon and the other to the sack-carrying demon who collects words skipped by clerics. In Finnish wall paintings the demon is usually depicted as writing down words on a parchment. The sack-carrying demon as a distinct character makes his first appearance in Jacobus de Voragine's *Sermones Vulgares*, a collection of sermons and *exempla*, and subsequently appears in a number of texts and geographical locations throughout the Middle Ages. In the story, Jacobus recounts a narrative about a 'fiend' who carries a heavy sack filled with verses

⁷⁹ Margaret Jennings, 'Tutivillus: The Literary Career of the Recording Demon', *Studies in Philology* 74 (1977), 1–95, here 13–17. According to Frances Lee Utley the devil with the scroll has been associated with Gregory the Great, St. Augustine of England and with St. Martin of Tours. Stories of such a devil have been recorded in poems and folk tales in France, England, Germany, Sweden and Estonia. Neufeld 2001, 45; Frances Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index about Women in English and Scottish Literature to the End of the Year 1568*, Ohio State University Press: Columbus, OH, 1944.

‘stolen’ from negligent clerics.⁸⁰ In the visual version of the Tutivillus story, it is, however, much more common to see the demon writing on parchment rather than collecting words into a sack. Jacobus recounts the story of the writing demon again in *Sermones Vulgares*. In the story a priest saw a demon stretching parchment with his teeth and when asked why, the demon answered that he was writing down idle words said in the church.⁸¹



Fig. 11. Siuntio Church, Warning to Gossips. Photo: Katja Fält.

⁸⁰ Jennings 1977, 1–95; Susan Philips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England*, The Pennsylvania University Press: Pennsylvania, PA, 2007, 22. In the *Index Exemplorum* the two stories have been catalogued as no. 1630a, ‘Devil (demon) records chatter in church’, and 1630b, ‘A devil collected in a sack all the garbled words uttered by the monks during mass’. Tubach 1969, 1630a, 1630b. The story appears, for example, in *Seelentrost*, a Low German collection of exempla from the fourteenth century that was partially translated into Swedish and Danish. *Seelentrost* was the main source for the exempla in the Nordic countries. Tubach 1968, 523.

⁸¹ Philips 2007, 22–23.

In Espoo the motif clearly relates to the recording narrative but instead of just one demon there are three of them. This is a typical feature in all the other wall paintings in medieval Finland representing the same story. According to Margaret Jennings, the story has been highly susceptible to agglutination and the number of characters increased over time.⁸² A famous example of several demons writing on parchment is in St. George Church in Reichenau (Germany) where the number of parchment-stretching demons is four and Tutivillus is the fifth demon actually writing on the parchment.



Fig. 12. Siuntio Church, Warning to Gossips. Photo Katja Fält.

⁸² There also seems to have been at least three different variations of the story already among thirteenth-century texts. Jennings 1977, 26.

Most thirteenth- and fourteenth-century textual versions speak of women in connection with Tutivillus.⁸³ The more typical version of Tutivillus shows the demon specifically with women,⁸⁴ as in the early sixteenth-century churches of Siuntio (Fig. 10), Hattula (fig. 16) and Rymättylä (Fig. 13). Here a demon is seen agitating women (and in one instance also men) into idle talk. In Hattula and Rymättylä the depiction shows only women but in Siuntio not one but two paintings show loquacious inattention of parishioners, both men and women (Figs. 11 and 12). In the fifth vault of the north aisle, just above the west wall, a demon sits between two veiled women and rests his hands intimately on their knees.⁸⁵ Typically the parchment on which the words are written is depicted in the motif. In Siuntio this detail is missing but in Rymättylä another small demon on the left side of the loquacious women seems to be holding a long parchment. In Hattula two writing bands almost twine around the two women which might be a reference to the parchment of Tutivillus.

In the parochial churches of medieval Finland the amount of writing demons is always no less than two. In the churches of Siuntio and Lohja (both decorated with paintings in the 1510s) writing demons are seen in a similar composition as in Espoo, stretching the parchment with their teeth and writing on it. In Lohja the painting is fragmented and only one demon is still visible (Fig. 15) but it seems that originally there have been three demons as in Espoo and Siuntio. In Espoo the demon on the top of the parchment is seen holding the stylus while other two demons on the right and left are stretching the parchment and holding ink-horns. Although the painting in Siuntio is partially fragmented, the similarities in the composition implicate that the demon with the stylus is similarly the one in the middle. Perhaps this was the case also in Lohja. It might be plausible to suggest that the demon with the stylus is Tutivillus since his function was clearly to write down the sins and idle words. In Hattula this is not as clear as the composition is somewhat different; two grinning demons with styluses and an ink-horn are making marks on something that undoubtedly stands for as the parchment.

⁸³ Jennings 1977, 27.

⁸⁴ Miriam Gill, 'Female Piety and Impiety. Selected Images of Women in Wall Paintings in England after 1300', in Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (eds), *Gender and Holiness. Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, Routledge: London and New York 2002, 101–120, here 101–110; Bardsley 2006, 52–58.

⁸⁵ A painting in the fifth vault of the south isle very similar to the one in the north aisle shows a demon jovially holding two men by the arm, although it is not clear whether the painting has a connection with the Tutivillus scene.



Fig. 13. The porch of Rymättylä Church, *Warning to Gossips*. Photo: Katja Fält.

Thus there seems to be two variations of the idea of idle and secular talk in the church with slightly different emphases. The demon with women (and in one occasion with men) can be connected to the motif of *Warning to Gossips*. Idle talk during mass was a concern for the church as talking and mumbling parishioners disturbed and interrupted the officiating priest. It was a question of power since the church aimed specifically to control people through mass, liturgy and sermon.⁸⁶ Gossiping in the church during Mass diverted people from the holy words and from personal contemplation. Idle speech was thus regarded as a form of spiritual laziness.

⁸⁶ Kathy Cawsey, 'Tutivillus and the "Kyrkchaterars": Strategies of Control in the Middle Ages', *Studies in Philology* 102 (2005), 434–451, here 441.



Fig. 14. Hattula church, Warning to Gossips. Photo Katja Fält

The *Warning to Gossips*, however, portrays the gossipers mainly as women as does the textual narrative. Such a clear gendering refers to the age-old concept of the susceptibility of women to gossiping. Female virtue was equated with silence or modest and gentle speech in sermons and literature.⁸⁷ It was assumed that if a woman was free with her speech then she must have been free with her sexuality too. A talkative woman was therefore an unchaste woman. According to Margaret Miles women's mouths, tongues and speech have been frequently correlated with the vagina – open when they should be closed, causing the ruin of all they tempt or slander. The association of garrulousness with wantonness

⁸⁷ Gill 2002, 101–120.

was part of the well-established polemic against women across many societies. Some manuals for women, for example, made it explicit how the speech of a noble woman was no less dangerous than 'the nakedness of her limbs'.⁸⁸ The motif further implicates demonic inspiration of gossip. Miriam Gill has argued that the association between the gossips and demons recalls misogynistic statements about the susceptibility of women to diabolic suggestion.⁸⁹

Kathy Cawsey has argued in connection with the Tutivillus texts that women talking in church were regarded dangerous because they were forming their own small feminine communities which excluded men and situate power outside men's control. Thus they create a confessional space where the priest has no access, and suggest vernacular interpretation of faith and its texts. Women's communities thus provide an alternate, heterodox space for spirituality and community and challenge orthodoxy and the institutions of the church; women's gossip in ecclesiastic context can be seen as a counter-discourse for the dominant, clerical discourse where women's speech also penetrates into the sacred space.⁹⁰ According to Christine Marie Neufeld the concern was also that women affect other women: that they can verbally seduce other women to disobedient behaviour.⁹¹

Tutivillus can also be interpreted in the context of the 'male eavesdropper' where the women's sphere of mutual speech is penetrated by an eavesdropping male, in this case Tutivillus who operates as a scribe. The trope of the 'eavesdropping male' reflects hierarchies of power and knowledge; writing down words whispered in secret or confidentiality fell well in line with 'clerical preoccupation with codification of confessional practices'. It is also connected to the abuse of confessional space and therefore reflect the church's concern over the confidentiality of the confessional settings. The textualisation of speech by the scribe could also be regarded as a textuality assigned with moral authority preserved for a male.⁹² In this case, this interpretation requires that Tutivillus is primarily gendered male.

⁸⁸ Such as Francesco Barbaro's treatise *De re uxoria* (*On wifely Duties*, chapter four, 1416). Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing. Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*, Vintage Books: New York 1989, 156, 165, 223fn.

⁸⁹ Gill 2002, 110.

⁹⁰ Cawsey 2005, 441–447; Neufeld 2001, 26–27.

⁹¹ Neufeld 2001, 26–27.

⁹² Neufeld 2001, 38–43, 46; Ann Marie Rasmussen, 'Gendered Knowledge and Eavesdropping in the Late-Medieval Minnerede', *Speculum* 77 (2002), 1168–1194, here 1188–1189.



Fig. 15. Lohja Church, Tutivillus. Photo: Heikki Hanka

Although the Warning to Gossips uses a gendered visual strategy by specifying the gossipers as women, it easily could have worked as a warning for gossipers of both sexes as female speech could have been regarded as a threat to both men and women.⁹³ In Siuntio, Rymättylä and Hattula the demons have been portrayed with women. Whether the motif was specifically targeted at women is more difficult to conclude. In Hattula the painting is in the north side of the nave. The placement of the Warning to Gossips in Siuntio might seem to suggest how men and women were placed during mass as the female gossipers have been painted on the north aisle and the male gossipers on the south side of the nave. There is no information about the seating order of the parochial churches in medieval Finland, although conventionally the north side has been associated

⁹³ Bardsley 2006, 57.

with women.⁹⁴ The Danish evidence suggests that men and women were seated separately, women on the north and men on the south.⁹⁵ The placement of the motif is in most cases in the western part of the nave, that is, at the back of the nave. But in Rymättylä the painting is the porch and thus it was available for observation mainly before and after mass.



Fig. 16. Hattula Church, Tutivillus. Photo: Katja Fält

Tutivillus and the recording demons in Hattula and Rymättylä can be seen in a literary and legal context where the words written down by the demon are seen as evidence in the case. The demon's desire to write down the gossip is an attempt to control it. Cawsey has argued how the story of gossiping women points to power structures where the tool of power is writing; monks and clerics would not have given writing any special status as written documents can be falsified, erased, or destroyed. It can also be examined in the context of the

⁹⁴ Hiekkänen 2007, 439.

⁹⁵ Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen, 'Syddør, norddør og det kønsopdelte kirkerum', *Hikuin* 36 (2007), 7–27, here 8–14.

relationship with orality and literacy in late medieval culture where oral culture has repeatedly been gendered feminine and textual culture as masculine. In reality, there were a lot of intermingling of the two.⁹⁶

On the other hand, for illiterate or barely literate people, women as well as men, writing would have seemed much more permanent and powerful, linked to the institutions of law, government and the church; and the mere existence of something written down would be adequate proof of sin. Writing in this sense could take almost magical characteristics.⁹⁷ In *Fornsvenska legendariet*⁹⁸, an anonymous legendary written between 1276 and 1307, the life of St. Basil tells how a young man out of lust for a woman dedicates himself to the devil who, feeling that the Christians are an unworthy lot, demands the young man to renounce God and commit himself to the devil *in writing* (in the end, the saint naturally saves the poor lad).⁹⁹ There is also information from Finland, not from the medieval period, though, but from the seventeenth century, of the written pacts between individuals and the devil. In 1646 the Chapter of Turku dealt with a case where a scribe named Eerik had written a pact between him and Satan with his own blood in which he pawned his body and soul for 400 *daler*. He faced public penalty and stood for two weeks in the place reserved for criminals in the Cathedral of Turku.¹⁰⁰

In some instances, the parchment-stretching has been associated with the notion of Christ being stretched on the cross. Søren Kaspersen has interpreted the Danish paintings of writing devils as depictions of the symbolic crucifixion of Christ.¹⁰¹ In medieval devotional literature, Christ's body was sometimes related to a book or parchment, his to blood ink, and the nails likened as etching writing on his ink.¹⁰² In a devotional context, the Christ-as-parchment could

⁹⁶ See for example Neufeld 2001, 35–39.

⁹⁷ Cawsey 2005, 440.

⁹⁸ Anonymous legendary written between 1276 and 1306 that modelled on texts such as *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus Voragine.

⁹⁹ Mitchell 2011, 110.

¹⁰⁰ Raimo Ranta, *Turun kaupungin historia 2, 1600–1721*, Turku: Oy Lounaisrannikko 1975, 711; Nenonen and Kervinen 1994, 158.

¹⁰¹ Søren Kaspersen, 'Kristus på korset og de sladrende kvinder - Om et yndet motiv i nordisk vægmaleri', *Ico*, nr. 2 (1984), 29–39.

¹⁰² See also for example Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 2008; Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, Routledge: London 1993; Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 2008. The parchment could also be a metaphor the Virgin Mary in which Christ was understood as a book written into the skin of the Virgin. Mary McDevitt, "'The Ink of Our Mortality': The Late-Medieval Image of the Writing

encourage audiences to engage the object of the text, Christ's body. The body of Christ, his skin stretched on the cross as parchment could operate as the focal point for meditating on the suffering of Christ.¹⁰³ According to Kaspersen, the gossiping women and recording demon can operate to remind people how their sins continually inflict the suffering of Christ.¹⁰⁴

The *Warning to Gossips* and Tutivillus both represent speech inside the church as idle and something that had to be controlled. Especially Tutivillus has been represented as keeping track of all thievery and extra-legal or even illegal 'collecting' that was going on.¹⁰⁵ Both the *Warning to Gossips* and Tutivillus seem to primarily target women, although word-recording demon could have been used to warn all parishioners. Nevertheless, the motifs draw connection between idle talk and femininity and represent speech mainly as feminised activity. In addition, Tutivillus can also be examined in the context of recording sins and eternal punishment as the deeds of the parishioners were being recorded and examined at the Judgement Day. Tutivillus can also be interpreted in devotional context where the motif encourages church-goers on introspection and meditation over the Passion of Christ.

Conclusion

The wall paintings in Espoo church representing women in the controversial company of demons operated in the context of social critique that aimed at defining the proper order of things but ended up strengthening stereotypes via symbolic inversion. The images also reminded of the social roles of women. The milking, churning and the Journey to Blåkulla exploit the iconography of a 'witch' that aims at suggesting behaviour regarded as unruly for women. They show women prone to tempting by demons and therefore prone to unwanted, uncontrolled or disobedient behaviour. The image of a 'witch' operated as a warning of what would happen if women did not follow the roles set out for them as obedient wives and mothers. Skoella and Tutivillus exploit the danger attached to speech, represented as demonically inspired. The motifs primarily

Christ Child', in Mary Dzon and Theresa M. Kennedy (eds), *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto etc. 2012, 224–253, here 240.

¹⁰³ Sarah Noonan, *Bodies of Parchment: Representing the Passion and Reading Manuscripts in Late Medieval England*, Unpublished PhD-thesis, Washington University in St. Louis 2010, All Theses and Dissertations (ETDs), 262, <http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/etd/262/> (retrieved 6 June 2016), 262–263, 268.

¹⁰⁴ Kaspersen 1984, 36–37

¹⁰⁵ Jennings 1977, 61–62.

show malevolent, suspicious or excess speech as feminised. Again it is women who need to be careful about their actions. In ecclesiastic environment, regulating speech as well as behaviour concerned the clergy and highlighting this in a visual manner could have operated as a way to influence people's behaviour. All the motifs are primarily based on medieval textual or literary sources, from various collections of sermon *exempla* used by the clergy. Transformed into visual images, their purpose as exemplary material might have stayed the same. For ecclesiastic authorities, such images may have been useful in attempts to transmit notions about sin and control to the parishioners.

In Espoo, unruly women and demons are combined with paintings representing Jesus in Gethsemane, the kiss of Judas, Jesus carrying the cross, crowning with thorns, flagellation, nailing to the cross and finally crucifixion. Painted on the vaults, the demons and witches are lurking above the heads of the parishioners while the crucified Christ is in the eye-level. Perhaps this was the power of the demon scenes. By contrasting them in such a striking manner to the emotional and affective events of the Passion, the message becomes underlined: beware of the harm unruly behaviour can do and resort to the contemplation and suffering of Christ. The images reminded people of the importance of following rules, codes and social norms. Especially in small communities, sins had an effect to the whole community. And all the sins and the thievery the parishioners committed were being continuously recorded by Tutivillus and his associates, inconspicuously yet unavoidably. He wrote down the words and misdeeds of parishioners that operated as evidence, used against the people in Judgement Day. But, at the same time, the promise of salvation was continuously offered through Christ's sacrifice, painted as a visual reminder on both the south and north walls. Christ, through the cross on which he died, was there to protect the parishioners from every danger, from mortal sins and from worldly shame.

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