The Devil's pact: a male strategy

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By the second half of the seventeenth century, as the witch trials reached their climax in Sweden, belief in the interventionist powers of the Devil had become not only a major preoccupation of the educated classes, but also seems to have considerably exercised the minds of the wider population, illiterate as well as literate. It is apparent, however, that different groups in society held different views as to the nature and consequences of dealing with the Devil. Both the Lutheran Church and the secular authorities held up Satan as the fount of all evil and used the figure and fear of Satan as a means of disciplining and controlling the populace. To have any sort of dealings with him was to commit not only the gravest of personal sins but to be complicit in his master-plan to undermine Christian society.¹ Yet, as nineteenth-century folklore collectors found, the Devil was not always considered a scary, dangerous figure. He held an ambivalent position in popular beliefs, and was even thought of by some as a reliable friend and helper.² This contrasting view of satanic relations is also revealed in the records of eighteenth-century Swedish prosecutions of those accused of making pacts with the Devil. As these trials show, for men in particular, the Devil provided a strategy for bettering one's position in life, and not necessarily at the expense of society. These Devil's pact trials also highlight the differing conceptions of female and male satanic relationships, and the way in which that fundamental tool of the Enlightenment – growing literacy – enabled a wider section of society to engage with Satan rather than reject him.

The idea of the Devil's pact

The concept of the Devil's pact was a prominent theme in early modern European theology. Central to the debate was the idea that witches and magical practitioners of all types gained their powers from selling their soul to the Devil. According to learned doctrines no human being could possibly possess any supernatural powers or occult knowledge.³ Only God could

perform miracles, but the Devil's exceeding knowledge of the world and the hidden properties of nature enabled him to do extraordinary things which appeared miraculous. Only by making a pact with the Devil could witches and magicians take advantage of the preternatural powers he possessed, and thereby perform whatever harmful or benign spells and divinations they desired. In relation to witchcraft, the Devil's pact was also thought to be a precondition for participation in those diabolic, orgiastic, perverted sabbaths, lurid details of which exercised the minds of many a theologian.⁴

Yet the origins of the characteristics of the archetypal satanic pact are not fully clear. There are obvious parallels with the alliances God made with Old Testament figures such as Noah, Abraham and David. Other analogues for the demonic pact also existed in medieval society, such as the feudal system of pacts made between vassals and their masters, and the common practice of dedicating children to God or the saints. These might also have served to normalise the possibility and practicability of entering into an allegiance with Satan. But the pact proper can be found much earlier, in a story attributed to the fourth century which tells how St Basil saved the soul of a servant who sought Satan's help to marry his master's daughter. Far more influential, however, was the legend concerning the sixth-century churchman, Theophilus of Sicily. Having been fired from his post, Theophilus was said to have entered into a written pact with the Devil, in which he renounced allegiance to Christ and the Virgin Mary. The legend was widely disseminated in pre-Reformation northern Europe, particularly through the medium of miracle plays.⁵ During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were increasing concerns about the practice of demonic magic. To borrow Richard Kieckhefer's phrase, there existed a 'clerical underworld' of ritual magicians who attempted to call up angels, spirits and demons for both lofty and base purposes. Instructions for such adjurations were to be found in a variety of secretly circulated grimoires and scrolls. Although there is little evidence of these medieval mages actually making formal agreements with the Devil, their desire to communicate with and exploit demons, and their reliance on written texts, undoubtedly led to growing suspicions in some quarters that pacts were being drawn up. This was a developing notion that made its own contribution to the rise of the witch persecutions.⁶

From the late sixteenth century onwards the most well-known and influential template for making a pact with the Devil was the legend of Dr Faust.⁷ Georg Faust was an astrologer, alchemist and magician who also lectured on the classics at various educational establishments in Germany during the 1520s and 1530s. He achieved considerable notoriety in his own lifetime, and apparently once admitted to a Franciscan friar that he had signed a pact with Satan in his own blood. It is thought that Faust died in the early 1540s, but thanks to the development and spread of the printing press, over the next two centuries the Faust legend spread across Europe and across the

social scale. The story was printed for the first time in a cheap *Volksbuch* (chapbook) by Johann Spiess of Frankfurt in 1587 and the first of many Dutch and English editions appeared soon after. It was the content of the English chapbooks which formed the basis of Christopher Marlowe's famous play *Doctor Faustus*, written shortly before his untimely death in 1593.⁸ The chapbooks tell how Faust conjured up one of Satan's minions, Mephistopheles, and wrote a blood contract with Satan which stipulated that the latter would fulfil all Faust's desires for a period of twenty-four years. Satan was as good as his word, and when the pact expired he came to earth and ripped Faust to pieces. Although meant as an entertaining cautionary tale, twenty-four years of having one's wishes come true must have appeared a rather attractive proposition to some readers.

During the late seventeenth century Francois Henri de Montmorency (1628–95), Duke of Luxembourg, also attracted a similar notoriety for diabolic collusion. The military successes of the French army under his command during the War of the Grand Alliance, particularly the heavy defeat of the English at Namur in 1692, generated a couple of publications in the 1690s claiming he had made a pact with Satan.⁹ During the early eighteenth century several editions of a popular German chapbook fabricated a detailed account of how Montmorency signed a pact with the Devil in 1659.¹⁰ The chapbook claimed to have been translated from the French in 1702 and listed the twenty-eight demands in the satanic contract, including the dismissal of an accusation of murder made against Montmorency. As with Faust, the chapbooks mixed fact and fantasy. One edition stated Montmorency made the pact while in the Bastille, for example. Montmorency had indeed spent a few months in the Bastille in 1679–80 after having been implicated in a notorious aristocratic poisoning scandal – thus the reference to the murder accusations, but in the wrong decade. The influence of the Montmorency legend is apparent from the fact that a copy of the story was found amongst the belongings of a man tried before the Swedish *Justitierevisionen* or King's Council on a charges of making a Devil's pact in 1776.¹¹

One of the intriguing aspects of the dissemination of these legends in Sweden is that there is little evidence of there having been any trade in Swedish language versions of the aforementioned chapbooks during the period. The earliest Faust chapbook in the collection of the National Library of Sweden is dated 1813.¹² It would seem that the Faust legend found its way into Swedish oral tradition largely from German literature, in particular via the conduit of Swedish soldiers who had fought in German lands. The Luxembourg book cited in the 1776 trial mentioned above was also almost certainly a German chapbook edition, while one young man prosecuted for attempting a pact confessed to having taken German lessons.

The Devil's pact: a terrible crime?

For the period 1680–1789 at least twenty-nine cases of Devil's pact appear in the records of the Swedish *Justitierevisionen* or King's Council.¹³ This was the highest legal institution in Sweden at the time, and acted as an appeal court which could grant pardons for those facing the death penalty. In 1779 it became the Supreme Court of Sweden. The Devil's pact was considered the gravest of crimes and was punishable by death.¹⁴ It was considered the very worst of blasphemies, breaking the alliance made with God at baptism. It was, as the legal records described it, a '*Crime Laesae Majestatis Divinae*' ('Crime Against the Heavenly Majesty'). The crime of blasphemy during the period needs to be seen within the context of two broad, interrelated developments during the second half of the seventeenth century: concerted attempts by the state to extend control and discipline over the mentalities and activities of the populace, and the consolidation of religious unity according to Lutheran tenets. This is evident from the nature and number of laws passed at the time, particularly the *Religions Stadgan* (Statute of Religion) of 1655. One can fit this period of Swedish history within the wider move towards the reformation of popular culture outlined by Peter Burke.¹⁵

Bearing the above developments in mind, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that there were Devil's pact trials during the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Yet, intriguingly, there was no decrease in the number of pact cases before the King's Council over the whole period concerned. Between 1680–1740 there were fourteen trials, and fifteen between 1741–89. While these figures certainly suggest a stable and unchanging popular belief in the power of the Devil during the eighteenth century, the trial material reveals a significant change in terms of the judicial interpretation of the alleged crime. One of the features of the Enlightenment was the general diminution of the scope of supernatural interventionism in earthly affairs, and as a result the Devil lost much of his power and threat in intellectual thought. So, during the first half of the period concerned great efforts were made by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities to ascertain whether the person accused of Devil's pact had actually gained anything from the Devil or not. From the mid-eighteenth century, however, attempts at making a demonic pact were increasingly but not always referred to as 'foolish imaginations'. The blasphemy of the satanic pact was explained more and more in medical rather than religious terms. Behaviour that had once been demonologised was increasingly pathologised. Those attempting a demonic pact were increasingly considered either ignorant, 'superstitious', mentally ill, or a combination of the three.

As early as 1727 a boy named Erik Ahlgren was punished for his credulity rather than for his evil intentions in attempting a pact with the Devil, and was forced to wear publicly a sign over his head stating what he had done.¹⁶ In

1757 after considerable investigation Axel Thomsson, who had stayed up many nights in a row in order to communicate with the Devil, was declared to be ignorant rather than a true blasphemer.¹⁷ According to his own statement in court, God could not help him in life but the Devil could. Several witnesses testified that Axel Thomsson was healthy in mind and body, so the reason for his ideas about the Devil was explained by the fact that he lacked a proper Christian education. His father had died when he was a young boy, no one had subsequently taken responsibility for his religious education, and he had never participated in Holy Communion. From such cases it would seem that judicial interpretation and leniency was also influenced by the youth of the defendants. Most of the boys accused before the King's Council of making a Devil's pact were pardoned from the death penalty because of their age, lack of knowledge of Christianity and for regretting their violation. The death penalty was, instead, usually transformed into some form of corporal punishment. All the youths had to undergo both secular and church punishment.¹⁸

The coexistence of both rational and supernatural legal interpretations of the criminal intent of those who professed to communicate with spirit beings, during the intellectual transitional period of the first half of the eighteenth century, is well illustrated by a legal case from 1722. In that year a young farmhand, Henrich Michelsson, from Yläkirjo village in the south of Finland, claimed to have met three angels on several occasions.¹⁹ The angels had, according to his own testimony, brought him messages from God to be mediated to the leaders of the church. Thorough investigations were made by the authorities concerning Michelsson's medical history, as his visions were initially thought to be the result of some illness. From a Lutheran perspective it would have been considered unlikely but not out of the question that angels had really visited him. It was the heavenly message, however, that caused problems and the need for alternative explanations, for Michelsson's angelic visitors communicated that the morals of the people needed improving, otherwise God would punish them by transforming all the bread in the city into stones. Examinations made by physicians showed, however, that Michelsson was of sound mind and body. According to several reliable witnesses there was no record of either mental or physical illness in his past. As Michelsson did not move in his sleep, it was concluded that the visions of the angels could not have been caused by dreams either. After a lengthy series of hearings and examinations the members of the court finally came to the conclusion that it must have been the Devil himself who had appeared to the young boy in the guise of the three angels. One indication of this was that the angels apparently appeared to be armed with bloodied swords.²⁰ A medical explanation was obviously preferred but despite strenuous efforts to find a flaw in Michelsson's medical history, the court had to fall back on the increasingly anachronistic model of demonological causation. In this way the idea of the power of the Devil still served an official function.

While the authorities obviously saw contact with the Devil as inimical to true Christian faith, at the popular level views on the 'unchristian' nature of pact-making were rather mixed. Certainly, in one case from 1740, three people explicitly pledged to cancel their Christian faith in writing in order to find a hidden treasure with the help of the Devil.²¹ Such pact-makers were quite aware of the gravity of the offence they were committing before God and the punishment the secular authorities could mete out. When Jöns Hasselgren was tried in 1714, he was asked if he knew what those condemned for Devil's pact were to expect. Hasselgren answered yes, and that this knowledge had not prevented him from committing the crime, but had rather inspired him.²² Awareness of the possible legal consequences is also evident in the case of Nils Svensson Bohlin, tried in 1746. He did not sign his contract with his own name, but made one up – Daniel Nilsson – in order not to be caught by the authorities.²³ Other evidence further suggests that people agreed with the authorities in considering the Devil's pact a heinous crime.²⁴ There are instances where people stumbled across written contracts, and immediately delivered them to the authorities instead of returning them to their authors, which proves the wisdom of Bohlin's strategy even if he was still caught in the end. In 1714, for example, a contract made by a soldier was found by his mother-in-law, who immediately gave it to a representative of the local authorities.²⁵ In 1702 a woman who had hidden a contract on behalf of a friend refused to keep the contract in the house once she became pregnant. The unborn child was potentially thought to be damaged by it.²⁶ Yet others did not necessarily see a fundamental conflict with the religious practice of their daily lives, nor consider their contract with God broken. Jöns Hasselgren, accused in 1714, upset the members of the King's Council by telling how he had kept his written contract with the Devil folded in his shoe while he participated in the Holy Communion. He had also continued saying his morning and evening prayers as usual after the contract had been written.²⁷ A journeyman had made his contract on a Sunday after he had taken part in the Divine Service and before he went to listen to the evening preaching.²⁸ Any guilt over the ungodly practice of bargaining with the Devil might have been assuaged by the notion that the Devil could be cheated at the time of the delivery of the body and the soul.²⁹ In popular belief it was thought possible to fool the Devil and it was common to tell stories about how easily he could be tricked. Such attitudes were far from the doctrines of the Lutheran church.³⁰

The Devil's pact: a male strategy

The vast majority of the accused brought before the Kings Council were men belonging to the educated classes. Only two were agricultural labourers. Nearly 50 per cent of the accused were soldiers, some of them of high rank.

Amongst the others one was a nobleman, a couple were farmers and the rest were burghers, clerks, journeymen, sailors, sheriffs and students. Most of these men were also from urban environments where the availability of the relevant literature and knowledge of the Faustian and Luxembourgian pacts circulated more freely.

The majority of those accused of making Devil's pacts were between seventeen and thirty years old, most being around twenty. Only two pact-makers were middle aged or older (fifty and sixty-two years of age). It is undoubtedly the case that in many instances, as Per Sörlin has observed, attempted assignations with the Evil One were boyish pranks, made out of pure curiosity rather than seriously contemplated and solemnly conducted affairs.³¹ Amongst schoolboys the attempt to make a pact was an act of anti-authoritarian bravado, akin to indulging in other forbidden activities such as smoking, drinking and playing cards. Some of the youths and young men admitted in court that they never had any real intention of handing over the contract. Anders Mårtensson, for example, said that he had made his contract just for 'fun' (*'narrerij'*).³² Apart from the letting of blood, the drawing up of the contract could be achieved quickly and easily, but the act of delivering it to the Devil was the cause of some hesitation and fear. In 1756 a student named Ganander left his contract under a gravestone, but immediately regretted what he had done and tried to retrieve the contract the same evening. As was explained in court, however, he had unfortunately been unable to move the heavy gravestone again.³³ As these cases show, the court was keen to determine the nature of the intent, and the effort which the accused had gone to in order to seek out Satan. A distinction was sometimes but not always made between assumed demonic contacts and actual pacts with the Devil. There are some cases where people were accused of Devil's pact even though they had not tried to establish such an agreement. The farmer Olof Johansson Lönneberg, for example, was accused of making a pact in 1776 even though he had not attempted to make either a written or oral pact. In the opinion of the authorities an agreement between Lönneberg and Satan must still have existed, as Lönneberg claimed to have been in close contact with the Devil. He had told people that he had been drinking together with the Devil, and according to several witnesses he had also called Satan 'my brother' on many different occasions.³⁴

While some of these youths and young men testified at their hearings that the idea and act of making a pact had been a spontaneous impulse,³⁵ most pact-makers had prepared themselves thoroughly. They gathered the required instruments, a tool to cut the finger with, paper, a pen and sometimes ink, as during the eighteenth century it became common to mix the blood with red ink. Several defendants told how they had carried this pact-making kit for a considerable time before plucking up courage and waiting for the right moment to come. The right moment was sometimes when the pact-maker bled

by accident. One soldier, for example, did not cut his finger in order to make the pact, but used blood from his leg when he happened to scratch it badly one day.

The written contract contained the conditions for both parties. In exchange for certain benefits, usually money, the Devil was promised the body and soul of the person who had entered the pact. The agreed duration of the pact was usually between five and thirty years, though one man asked for sixty years.³⁶ Most pacts were made individually, but in three cases two or three people drew up a joint agreement.³⁷ There was also a tradition that three copies of the contract had to be made, though in only three cases out of the twenty-nine studied had this been done. The signed contract was often left for the Devil in churchyards or at crossroads on a Thursday night, and in Scandinavia more generally numerous written contracts have also been found in the keyholes of church doors. All the essential aspects of the contract had to be correct otherwise it was considered invalid. Those like Anders Mårtensson, however, who failed to conduct the procedure properly could consider themselves fortunate if they ended up being prosecuted for their attempts. As the court heard at his trial in 1694, Mårtensson had neither signed nor dated his contract. Furthermore, he had carried the contract around with him in his pocket, believing that Satan would come and ask him for it when the time was right. As the contract was made incorrectly and had not been delivered, and as Mårtensson was obviously as poor as when he drew up the contract, it was concluded that the pact could not possibly have taken place and he was therefore pardoned from the death penalty.³⁸

The written contract was not the only means of making a pact.³⁹ The Devil accepted other methods of transaction. One could, for example, call upon him by running backwards around a church or blowing into the keyhole of a church door. In a trial from 1772 the defendant confessed to keeping some soil from an execution ground in a napkin, with the intention of giving it to the Devil in a churchyard, thereby making a pact.⁴⁰ Oral pacts were also made. In two cases soldiers accused of fraternising with Satan admitted in court that they had made a verbal agreement with him.⁴¹ In both of these cases the agreement had apparently been settled with a handshake.

Motives

It has been asserted that the main reason for making a pact with the Devil was to ensure success at hunting,⁴² but in fact by far the most common motive was money.⁴³ All those tried before the King's Council had expected to receive some form of financial reward from the Evil One. Sometimes an unspecified, one-off lump sum was requested, and sometimes a regular income was demanded for the entire duration of the pact. The soldier Zacharias Elfing, for instance, asked the Devil for three silver coins a month for a period of

twenty years.⁴⁴ The majority of youths and young men asked for money for specific purposes, usually to pay off debts. Inability to work and the consequent fear of economic ruin were also major determinants. For example, a journeyman wrote his contract after eighteen months of unemployment.⁴⁵ Johan Strömwall, who was condemned in 1776 was punished not only for making a pact with the Devil, but also for having written two false cheques, which indicates the state of his financial problems.⁴⁶ The farmhand Lars Olofsson, tried in 1776, was unable to work properly due to the onset of physical disability of some sort. His brother, who was a farmer, offered to support him if he would help with some of the easier tasks on the farm. After having stayed with his brother for several years, Lars decided to make a pact with the Devil in order to solve his financial dependence.⁴⁷

Erik Ahlgren confessed to entering a pact because of severe anxiety about his economical situation.⁴⁸ His financial problems were so bad that he had even considered committing suicide because of them. His distress shows clearly in his written contract as follows:

Högt ärade fader fanen ⁴⁹ min högsta förtröstare
 Dhet jag åtskilliga gånger min kära fader tillskrifwer, men
 icke blifwit med swar hugnader, så will jag än en
 gång tillbedia min kära fader i min begjären
 sampt om Du intet min sedel till dig tager
 jag den igen får, om jag får så många penningar iag
 här i wärlden behöver skall iag tiena dig här i wärlden
 med Kråp och Siäl och när iag dör skall K(ära) fader
 fanen i betalning åtniutha både Kråp och Siähl
 iag wäntar härpå ett gunsigt swar och det
 i morgon afton, rent ut säijandes der iag
 intet blifwer med swar hugnader så skrifwer
 iag intet mehr ej heller friwilligen finner
 dig men blifwer iag i min
 begjären hugnade skall detta Contractet
 stå fast och aldrig i Efwighet rubbas
 som med mit blod och egenhändigas
 namns undersättiande bekräftas
 d 5 Juli 1727
 Erik Ahlgren
 Härpå wäntas swar i morgon afton att iag wet hwar
 effter iag mig regulera skall hiepl mig fader
 skall intet ångrat

[Highly regarded father the Devil my highest comfort
 I have written to you several times dear father, but
 not been graced with an answer, so I will still one
 time ask you my dear father in my own request
 also if you don't accept this piece of paper

that I will get back, if I get as much money as I
 will need in this world, I will serve you in this world
 with body and soul and as I die will D(ear) father
 the Devil as payment get both Body and Soul
 I expect a positive answer and that
 until tomorrow evening, frankly speaking if
 I will not get an answer I will
 never write again or deliberately look for you
 but if I will be answered in my
 wishes this Contract will stand and
 never in eternity be removed
 that with my own blood and my own
 name and signature is confirmed

July 1727

Erik Ahlgren

Upon this I expect an answer until tomorrow evening so that I know
 what I have to subject myself to, help me father
 you will not regret it]

With regard to the financial incentives of selling one's soul, it is also worth mentioning that the Devil was also thought to operate a loans policy as well. The pact-maker's body and soul were only to be delivered to Satan if the sum of money was not returned on a settled date. Thus one man accused in 1702 had asked the Devil for 10,000 'rix-dollars' in silver coins, which according to the contract was to be paid back on 30 November 1710.⁵⁰

Although desire for money was an obvious reason for selling one's soul to the Devil, there were other common motives. Soldiers asked for protection against bullets and to be successful in battle. As one soldier wrote in his contract, 'please, just let me live for 20 years in this world'.⁵¹ Demands made by farmers and farmhands also reflected the nature of their existence, for they usually asked to be granted a 'free-shot' (*friskytt*), meaning that the quarry would always appear conveniently before them and that they would always be able to hit it. In order to be granted a free-shot by the Devil, one could also take a sacramental wafer from the Holy Communion, hang it in a tree and shoot through it. During the period under investigation three people were tried for stealing holy wafers, possibly for this reason, though the host was used in other magic rituals as well.⁵² Putting the host in the barrel of a gun was also thought to bring good hunting luck without involving the Devil. In one case brought before the King's Council the accused admitted that he had taken the host with him into the forest, then suddenly regretted his intentions and eaten it.⁵³ Other requests in addition to money and the above demands concerned good fortune in general, wisdom, physical strength, good luck in playing cards, to be successful with women, to have beautiful clothes and to possess the ability to play the violin and other musical instruments. Antero Heikkinen mentions a case from 1661 when a student at Åbo Akademi

in Finland was said to have learned several foreign languages, among others Latin and Hebrew, in less than one day with help of the Devil.⁵⁴

While all the above incentives for selling one's soul concerned bettering one's life in some way, at least one man used the pact as a rather confused strategy to end his life. In 1699 he confessed before a local court in Hällestad, that he had made a pact with the Devil in order to be executed.⁵⁵ Theologically it was possible for the soul to be rescued even if a person was executed for committing a crime, but if a person committed suicide there was no hope for eternal life. The Hällestad case is not some bizarre anomaly. Similar self-accusations to obtain 'judicial suicide' became frequent enough in the eighteenth century to constitute a real problem for the authorities, for innocent people might be executed while sinners might not be punished properly before the eyes of God.⁵⁶ Yet if this really was the intention of the Hällestad man then it was surely misguided from an official perspective. From the Church's point of view – if not from his own – his soul was damned for making a pact in the first place.

One wonders what similar conflicting and confused thoughts went through the mind of a soldier named Johan Gottfried Ekelau, who was condemned for sodomy in the year 1728. As the minister of his parish was preparing Ekelau prior to being beheaded and burned at the stake, he asked him if he had anything else on his conscience that he wanted to confess. At this moment Ekelau admitted, amongst other things, that he had made a pact with the Devil. The execution was thus postponed as new court hearings had to take place to try this addition to his crimes. The case finally came before the Kings Council in the year of 1731. Perhaps the three years' reprieve from death is what had motivated Ekelau. Because he had, according to his own testimony, received everything that he had wished from the Devil, the case was investigated thoroughly resulting in over eighty pages of statements and testimonies.⁵⁷ He had asked Satan for money, success in fights, good luck by playing cards and to be successful with women. On making the pact in 1724 the Devil had immediately given him a purse filled with money, which Ekelau, by his own admission, used for 'unnecessary expenses' such as gambling, drinking and buying beautiful clothes.

During the trial Ekelau described in great detail further meetings with the Devil. At springtime in the year of 1725 he was taken ill and decided to cancel the pact. He contacted the minister of his local church in order to get help to do this, but the Devil began to harass him in many different ways. Ekelau claimed that Satan appeared variously in the guise of a man dressed in black clothes, a black dog, a black cat, a lynx, a dragon, a goat and a gipsy. He violently attacked Ekelau on several occasions, throwing him from one wall of the room to another, splitting his head in three places, and demanded he re-establish the contract. The Devil had also taken back the purse of money, but asserted that Ekelau still belonged to him. Several witnesses

testified that they had seen how Satan had caused Ekelau physical pain and made it impossible for him to talk or to move his body. On one occasion the Devil lay on top of him as he was sleeping in his bed at night, so that he had difficulties breathing. In court Ekelau said that he thought that the Devil wanted to suffocate him.

The Devil, men and women

The characteristics of male contact with the Devil, as discussed so far, differed significantly from perceptions at the time of female relationships with the Devil, whether in the context of witchcraft or possession.⁵⁸ Men desired and deliberately sought out Satan, whereas Satan sought out women either to seduce and beguile them into a relationship or to physically force them into accepting his presence. Women were viewed as the weaker sex, emotionally and morally, and consequently easier prey for the wiles of the Devil. So far only one woman in Sweden is known to have made a formal pact with the Evil One in the same manner as those male examples described already.⁵⁹ Men turned to the Devil as an all-knowing masculine confidant. Axel Thomsen for example had stayed up many nights in a row just to talk to the Devil.⁶⁰ He said at his trial that his problems were so complicated, that Satan was the only one who could help him. Men also regarded the Devil as a business partner, and as such some of the young men who were prosecuted tried to make the pact look attractive to him. Per Nilsson, accused in 1698, had asked the Devil for wisdom and offered to give him a share of the extra earnings such wisdom would generate.⁶¹ Men like Nilsson felt it necessary to persuade the Devil into a bargain, as if he otherwise had little interest in seizing men's souls, a scenario contrary to that drawn by the theologians. When it came to females, though, the Devil was all too ready to ensnare them. Female contacts with Satan were, as a rule considered more of threat than those of men.⁶² A man who assigned himself to the Devil did so for personal gain but not at the expense of others, and only put his own soul in danger. Women, on the other hand, contracted with the Devil for anti-social purposes. The favours they gained from Satan were not concerned with personal aggrandisement, but were used to inflict misfortune on others, in particular to harm the production of milk and the breeding of cattle. As the folklore sources indicate, people believed women stole milk from their neighbours with the aid of the Devil, and paid him back with a portion of the butter produced.⁶³

Witchcraft accusations apart, women also actually resorted to the Devil for personal gain, but adopted a different strategy from that of men, which was consequently open to different interpretation. By way of example we can use two cases of female possession that were heard in the King's Council during the period under investigation, one in 1690 and the other in 1708.⁶⁴ In both cases the women were accused of blasphemy 'for having let Satan

take their body in possession', but were finally condemned for fraud.⁶⁵ It was decided that they had pretended to be possessed by the Devil in order to take personal advantage of the diabolic discourse amongst the clergy and the wider population. It is significant that both of the accused women lived on the margins of society. They were both somewhat elderly, unmarried, sick, homeless and had no relatives to support them. The woman tried in 1708 had an impressive criminal record. She had lied about her place of birth, used a false passport, had attempted murder and profaned God. She had in many ways been a burden to both the authorities and to the inhabitants in several villages where she had stayed. Because of her supposed possession villagers had provided her with food and a roof over her head. Some of them complained to their local authorities that they had to burn candles for her all night long and that several men had to look after her night and day. In respect of female strategies involving claims of satanic relations, it is also worth noting a recent study by the Finnish historian Jari Eilola.⁶⁶ He examined the seventeenth-century trials of three women in Finland accused of killing their newborn babies. In order to be pardoned from the accusations, they claimed that Satan was the father of the children, and so they were, therefore, mercy killings and not true infanticide.

From a legal point of view, the increased caution of the eighteenth-century King's Council towards proof of satanic relations in some respects worked in favour of women. Most of the men accused of making Devil's pacts were actually guilty of the 'crime', and confessed as much in court. More significantly there often existed physical proof of their crime in the form of the written contract. These were usually displayed as evidence in court. Although many contracts were destroyed as evil profanities after the trials were over, their contents were written down by the court clerks. Some of the accused understandably initially denied that they had written the contracts produced in court, but later on admitted their guilt after handwriting tests were conducted. Because women accused of contracting with the Devil were rarely guilty of the crime, and, even if they were, they rarely resorted to written contracts, it was difficult to provide sufficient evidence to prove guilt.

As the cases heard by the King's Council demonstrate, in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden different groups in society used the concept of the satanic pact for different purposes. Despite the Church's attempt, through preaching and publication, to present the Devil as being the source of all iniquity, with whom no man or woman should ever have any dealings, many people saw the Devil as amoral, maybe, but hardly the essence of pure evil. He was someone they could do business with. The secular authorities supported the Church in its aims, and were responsible for punishing such blasphemous views, which were considered to disturb the social and moral

order. The fact that people continued to seek out the Devil in eighteenth-century Sweden represents, therefore, not only a failure of Lutheran inculcation but also of state social control. At a personal level, some individuals believed that the Devil could offer what neither state nor Church could provide. Through studying the trials we also gain new insights into the melting pot of intellectual thought at a time when Enlightenment philosophies and increasingly sophisticated attitudes towards jurisprudence, both combined with and reacted against still dominant and influential Lutheran views on society and morality.

Notes

- 1 For a general survey of religious attitudes to magic and witchcraft in Lutheran Scandinavia see Jens Chr. V. Johansen, 'Faith, Superstition and Witchcraft in Reformation Scandinavia', in Ole Peter Grell (ed.), *The Scandinavian Reformation* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 179–211.
- 2 See Ulrika Wolf-Knuts, *Människan och djävulen. En studie kring form, motiv och funktion i folklig tradition* (Åbo, 1991), pp. 219–21. Wolf-Knuts describes in what way the consequences of meetings with Satan could be positive and useful and how undesired contacts with the Devil could also be used successfully.
- 3 That a human being could make an agreement with Satan was not accepted by all intellectuals of the period. In the opinion of some demonologists Satan was nothing but a spirit and was therefore unable to have any kind of physical contact with humans. For detailed insights into the various intellectual views on satanic relations see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997).
- 4 The concept of the witches' sabbath was not prominent in witch trials throughout Europe, and its distribution requires further analysis. While it was a strong element in Swedish prosecutions, for example, it was not in Danish witch trials. See Johansen, 'Faith, Superstition and Witchcraft in Reformation Scandinavia'; P. Sörlin, *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden, 1635–1754* (Brill, 1999). More generally see Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (2nd edn, London, 1995).
- 5 See Ülo Valk, *Perkele, Johdatus demonologiaan* (Tampere, 1997), p. 116; Roland Grambo, *Djevelens livshistorie: Scener fra en travel tilvaerelse* (Oslo, 1990), pp. 141–2; Carl-Martin Edsman, 'Djävulpakt och besatthet. Ett 1700-talsdokument', in Lennart Elmevik (ed.), *Dialekter och folkminnen. Hyllningsskrift till Maj Reinhammar den 17 maj 2000* (Uppsala, 2000); J. B. Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 1984), p. 81; Ingrid H. Shafer, 'Pacts with the Devil: Faust and Precursors' (1996), www.usao.edu/~facshaferi/faust.html; Jan Wall, 'Wilt thou nu falla nedh och tilbidja mig', in Ulrika Wolf-Knuts (ed.), *Djävulen. Seminarium den 13 Nov. 1990*, IF Rapport 13 (Åbo, 1990), p. 24.
- 6 Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 151–75; Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law* (Hassocks, 1978); Edward Peters, 'The Medieval Church and State on Superstition, Magic and Witchcraft: From Augustine to the Sixteenth Century', in Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages* (London, 2001), pp. 173–238.
- 7 See Marianneli Sorvakkö-Spratte, 'Ein unmoralisches anbot?' – oder der Teufelspakt Fausts in ausgewählten Werken der deutschsprachigen Literatur von der Entstehung der

- Legende bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Åbo, 1998); Grambo, *Djevelens livshistorie*, Peter Boehmer and Sidney Johnson (eds), *Faust Through Four Centuries: Retrospective and Analysis* (Tübingen, 1989).
- 8 See, for example, P. F. Gent, *The Historie of the Damnable Life, and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* (London, 1592).
 - 9 See the following English versions, *The Bargain which the Duke of Luxembourg, General of the Troops of France, made with the Devil, to win battles* (London, 1692); *A Letter from a Trooper in Flanders, to his Comrade: Shewing, that Luxembourg is a Witch, and Deals with the Devil* (London, 1695).
 - 10 See, for example, *Luxembourg des weltberuffenen Herzogs von Luxembourg ... Pacta oder Verbündniß mit dem Satan, und das darauf erfolgte erschrockliche Ende* (c. 1715).
 - 11 Justitierevisionens Utslagshandlingar, 4 April 1776, nr. 1/2 k.
 - 12 See, for example, *Den i hela världen bekante store svart-konstnären och trollkarlen doctor Johan Faust och hans med djefvulen upprättade förbund* (Wexiö, 1813).
 - 13 The number of cases is not final as this paper is based on an on going research project. Finland was a part of Sweden from the Middle Ages until 1809.
 - 14 Sven Kjällerström, *Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 jämte studier kring tillkomst, innehåll och användning* (Lund, 1971), pp. 9, 71, 88, 92.
 - 15 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978).
 - 16 Riksarkivet (hereafter RA), Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 November 1727, nr. 21.
 - 17 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 March 1757, nr. 27.
 - 18 For Lutheran attitudes towards the role of church and state regarding punishment see Sven Kjällerström, *Den svenska kyrkoordningen*, pp. 304–5.
 - 19 Soili-Maria Eklund (Olli), 'Drängen Henrich Michelsson änglasyster. Demonologiska och medicinska förklaringsmodeller i tidig modern tid', in Hanne Sanders (ed.), *Mellem Gud og Djaevlen. Religiøse og magiske veldensbilleder i Norden 1500–1800* (Copenhagen, 2002).
 - 20 It was thought possible for the Devil to take any shape even that of an angel. On popular visions in Scandinavia see Arne Bugge Amundsen, "'Mig Engelen Tilltalte Saa ...': Folklige visoner som kulturell kommunikation, Saet ick evantro i min overtroes stead. Studier i folketro og folkelig religiositet', in Arne Bugge Amundsen and Anne Erikssen (eds), *Festskrift till Ornulf Hode på 60-årsdagen* (Oslo, 1995); Jürgen Beyer, *Conception of Holiness in the Lutheran Countries, c. 1550–1700*, *Studies in Folklore and Popular Religion*, vol. 3 (Tartu, 1999).
 - 21 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 24 January 1740, nr. 43.
 - 22 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, General Auditörens handlingar, Utslagshandlingar, 7 June 1714, nr. 8.
 - 23 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, General Auditörens handlingar, Utslagshandlingar 23 July 1746, nr. 84.
 - 24 Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller Natur. Synen på magi i Sverige under 1600- och 1700-talet* (Stockholm/Stehag, 1999), pp. 194–5.
 - 25 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 16 September 1714, nr. 21.
 - 26 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 5 February 1702, nr. 16.
 - 27 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, General Auditörens Handlingar, 7 June 1714, nr. 8.
 - 28 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 November 1731, nr. 25.

- 29 Paul Danielsson, *Djävulsgestalten i Finlands svenska folktro, II. Djävulen i människogestalt, Bidrag till kännedom af Finlands natur och folk* (Helsinki, 1932), p. 42.
- 30 Russell, *Lucifer*, p. 63. See also Ülo Valk, 'On the Connections between Estonian Folk Religion and Christian Demonology', *Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* 8 (1994) 197.
- 31 Per Sörlin, *Trolldoms- och Vidskepelseprocesserna i Göta hovrätt 1635–1754* (Umeå, 1993), p. 30.
- 32 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 31 October 1694, Bunt III, nr. 334.
- 33 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 1 December 1756, nr. 3.
- 34 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 22 December 1776, nr. 49.
- 35 See also Sörlin, *Trolldoms- och Vidsk*, p. 30.
- 36 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, Utslagshandlingar, 30 May 1733, nr. 72.
- 37 Thus the total number of people accused in the trial period so far is thirty-five.
- 38 Soili-Maria Eklund (Olli), 'Church Demonology and Popular Beliefs in Early Modern Sweden. The Presumption of the Devil', delivered at the Budapest Conference 'Demons, Spirits and Witches, Christian Demonology and Popular Mythology', 7–9 October 1999, and to be published in the forthcoming conference proceedings.
- 39 See Wall, 'Wilt thou nu', p. 26.
- 40 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar 31 January 1772, nr. 102.
- 41 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 October 1698, Bunt VII, nr. 20 and JR Utslagshandlingar, 20 July 1731, nr. 87.
- 42 Ebbe Schön, *Häxor och trolldom* (Kristianstad, 1991). Schön did little systematic investigation of the legal material, and by making assumptions on the basis of only a few cases, has misrepresented the characteristics of the Devil's pact.
- 43 Sörlin, *Trolldoms – och Vidsk*, p. 30.
- 44 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 16 September 1714, nr. 2.
- 45 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 November 1731, nr. 25.
- 46 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 4 April 1776, nr. 1/2k.
- 47 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 July 1776, 17, nr. 56 1/2.
- 48 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 November 1727, nr. 21.
- 49 The Swedish name *Fan* was normally used for the Devil in popular contexts.
- 50 Eklund (Olli), 'Church Demonology and Popular Beliefs in Early Modern Sweden'. The similarity to a business agreement is obvious.
- 51 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 16 September 1714, nr. 21.
- 52 These three cases are not included in the twenty-nine cases of Devil's pact.
- 53 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 23 March 1699, Bunt IX a, nr. 15.
- 54 Antero Heikkinen, 'Paholaisen Liittolaiset. Noita- ja magiakäsityksiä ja -oikeudenkäyntejä Suomessa 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskolla (n. 1640–1712)', *Historiallisia Tutkimuksia, Suomen Historiallinen Seura* 78 (1969) 141–50.
- 55 Sörlin, *Trolldoms- och Vidsk*, p. 30.

- 56 For more information on 'judicial suicide' see Jonas Liliequist, *Brott, Synd och Straff. Tidlagsbrottet i Sverige under 1600- och 1700-talet* (Umeå, 1991), pp. 108–13.
- 57 Eklund (Olli), 'Church Demonology and Popular Beliefs in Early Modern Sweden'.
- 58 Marko Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus ja noitavainot. Ala-Satakunnan, Pohjois-Pohjanmaan ja Viipurin Karjalan maaseudulla 1620–1700* (Helsinki, 1992); Wall, 'Wilt thou nu'.
- 59 Sörlin, *Trolldoms – och Vidsk*, p. 30.
- 60 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 March 1757, nr. 27.
- 61 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 January 1698, Bunt VII, nr. 20.
- 62 Linda Oja, 'Kvinnligt, manligt, magiskt. Genusperspektiv på folklig magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige', *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* (1994) 40.
- 63 Wall, 'Wilt thou nu', 27.
- 64 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar 13 June 1690, Bunt V, nr. W 111 and 19 March 1708, nr. 52.
- 65 Also this formulation used by the authorities shows that the woman is considered to be passive.
- 66 Jari Eilola, 'Paholaisen Rakastajattaret, Kolme naista ja heidän tutkimiseen liittyviä ongelmia', in Olli Matikainen (ed.), *Rikos Historiassa, Jyväskylän Historiallisen Arkisto* (Jyväskylä, 2000), pp. 181–228.