

In word and thread

Gertrud Svensdotter

Dear Gertrud,

Your name appears in the sources in Älvdalen, 1668. You were a child, about twelve years old, in a parish where faith, community and daily life were closely interwoven. What happened there would, in a short time, spread to other parts of Dalarna and grow into one of the most far-reaching phases of the Swedish witch persecutions.

The first accusations did not arise from one central trial, but from stories that began to circulate within the community. Children said that they were taken at night to Blåkulla, a place imagined as a gathering of witches and demonic powers. Within the community, their words were given the weight of truth.

You too spoke.

What you said was written down and became part of a growing wave of accusations and interrogations. Name followed name. Accusations spread from family to family, from village to village. What began as separate statements grew into a chain of suspicion, in which each declaration could provoke new trials.

In this context, the distinction between witness and accused became blurred.

You became part of that system. Your position changed, not at one clear moment, but through the logic of the process itself. The same mechanisms that made others suspect could also encompass you. The archives do not show a completed story, but a movement in which roles shift and boundaries become unclear.

What took place in Älvdalen formed the beginning of a broader wave of persecutions that would become known as *Det stora oväsendet*. In the years that followed, trials were held in various Swedish regions. They were often based on testimonies by children, combined with existing ideas about witchcraft. The legal procedures had a recognizable form, but depended heavily on confessions and statements that were interpreted within an already existing belief system.

About who you were outside these events, we know hardly anything. The sources preserve no daily life, no voice outside the trial. They record only what was spoken within the framework of accusation and interrogation.

My sweater begins with the *folkdräkttröja* from Dalarna. Not a knitted garment, but a piece made of fulled wool cloth, richly decorated with hand embroidery around the neck, embedded in parish, tradition and social structure. It is precisely within that framework that the trials could arise and spread.

Originally, the embroidered motifs were recognizable signs of regional tradition and community. In my sweater, they also refer to the fragile boundary between belonging and being excluded. The crosses are not intended as ornament, but as a reference to a practice deeply embedded in the archives. Many who were accused could not write and signed their statements with a small cross. In this way, a simple mark became a legal act, a confirmation under pressure, a trace of presence in documents that preserve little else of their lives.

Between these signs appears a double spiral. A form that suggests movement: not linear, but circling, returning, repeating itself. It refers to patterns that do not develop in one direction, but strengthen

and expand themselves. Just as the accusations spread, not as a straight line, but as a tightening network.

Below it, you see a symbol known today as the triple moon: a combination of three moon phases. Historically, this image does not belong to the seventeenth-century Swedish context, but it is consciously used here as a contemporary layer. The moon, in its cyclical change, stands for transition, rhythm and shifting.

In the neckline, the triple moon motif alternates with a sun. Together they form a rhythm of light and dark, day and night, presence and disappearance. In this way, the motif is not fixed in one moment of accusation, but opened towards movement, change and the passing of time.

With my sweater, I pass no judgement on what was said. With word and thread, I show how stories, fear and conviction could take hold within a community and how quickly people could be swept along in them. I want to make visible the structure in which words were given meaning and had consequences.

Your name has been preserved, Gertrud, as a trace leading to the beginning of the Swedish witch persecutions, no more than that. With my sweater, your story also returns, and I make room for the child behind the accusations, apart from the role that the trials imposed on you.

Stitch by stitch.

With reverence,
Micca