

ATT SLUTA FRÅN BÖRJAN

*Tidigmodern läsning och
folkbokens receptionestetik*

Rikard Wingård

INSTITUTIONEN FÖR LITTERATUR,
IDÉHISTORIA OCH RELIGION



Akademisk avhandling
för avläggande av filosofie dok-
torexamen i litteraturvetenskap
vid Göteborgs universitet, som
med tillstånd av humanistiska
fakultetsnämnden kommer att
offentligen försvaras tisdagen den
31 maj 2011, kl. 10.15 i Lilla hör-
salen, Humanistiska fakulteten,
Renströmsgatan 6, Göteborg



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

ABSTRACT

Rikard Wingård, *Att sluta från början : Tidigmodern läsning och folkbokens receptionestetik*
(*To End from the Beginning : Early Modern Reading and the Reception Aesthetics of the Volksbuch*)
Ph.D. dissertation in Swedish with a summary in English, 432 pp. ISBN 978-91-979587-0-7
Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion,
University of Gothenburg, PO Box 200, SE-405 30, Gothenburg, Sweden.

The thesis poses the question, why were Volksbücher read and loved by some people in the early modern period and at the same time criticized by others. By doing so three important goals are aimed at: 1) to arrive at a better and more stable definition of the concept of the Volksbuch; 2) to develop a better and more adequate reception theory for premodern and early modern culture, readers and literature, than has hitherto been conceived; 3) to get a better understanding of Volksbücher as literary objects, of their mode of expression.

Beginning with an analysis of the Swedish academic use of the concept of the Volksbuch from 1817 to present it is stated that none of the attempts to define the term have been very successful. It is proposed that a more promising definition of the Volksbuch concept is as a concept of historical reception.

The reception history of the early modern Swedish Volksbücher is outlined, with comparisons to the Danish and German history. It is concluded that the history of the readership of the early modern Volksbuch in Sweden follows to a large extent that in neighbouring countries, and that the prevalence of lower class reading of Swedish Volksbücher during the 17th century should not be so easily dismissed as it has been by several scholars.

By introducing a theoretical superstructure based on David R. Olson's *The World on Paper* (1994) the analysis digs into the works of the humanist scholar Juan Luis Vives and his relatively detailed and influential critique of Volksbücher. Vives' Christian normative understanding of reception and modern reception theory is identified as a version of what Wolfgang Iser has called the classical norm of interpretation. This norm represents one of two ways of reaching what is called an *encompassment of meaning* (*meningsomslutenhet*), in reading as well as in life. Associated with official Christianity, literacy and modern hermeneutics, it is a method of expansion. By stretching beyond the field of personal experience, time, and place it tries in dialog with the unfamiliar to fit the pieces together into a coherent and meaningful whole. We name this *the expansive type of reading*.

Having observed that the expansive type of reading does not harmonize with the response-inviting structures of the Swedish Volksbuch edition of *Seven Wise Masters* (1642), but rather with the oral and archaic structures described by Olson and Mircea Eliade, there is reason to suppose a connection between an oral/archaic sense of experiencing and the reading of stories, similar to that which the expansive type of reading represents. This second way of experiencing is not built on expansion, but contraction. In order to establish encompassment of meaning in the beginning of and during life (reading) the individual assimilates new experience with those already possessed, making them instantly familiar. By not taking note of the difference between the said and the meant, and by the force of different means of apprehending the future and a limited consciousness of profane history, time is contracted and eradicated into an ever present moment. Hence, we call this *the assimilative type of reading*.

It is found that 17th century Swedish Volksbücher, e.g. *Helen of Constantinople*, *Apollonius of Tyre*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, and several others, in their contexts, intertexts, typographical layout, peritexts, narratives, and symbolism, are filled with dominant response-inviting structures which potentially support the assimilative type of reader. It is concluded that one reason for the antipathies raised against Volksbücher during the early modern period are due to these pronounced response-inviting structures, structures that did not match the literary preferences of the critics. In short, the expansive type of reader should have difficulties finding satisfaction in reading the Volksbücher under discussion. In addition, the thesis has shown that we could expect to find empirical variants of the assimilative type of reader during the early modern period, and that their (ideal) way of reading seems to be thoroughly compatible with the same response-inviting structures. This accounts, at least in some measure, for the relative popularity of the Volksbücher.

Keywords: *Early modern reading, reception theory, reception aesthetics, history of literary criticism, book history, bibliography, literacy, orality, Swedish early modern literature, Volksbücher, Chapbooks, Bibliothèque Bleue, Seven sages of Rome, Helen of Constantinople, Fortunatus, Apollonius of Tyre, Theagenes and Charichla, Till Eulenspiegel, Juan Luis Vives*

Distribution: Frondes, Skälebacken 132, 451 95 Uddevalla, Sweden. (frondes@mail.com)