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En Galant Giönge=Wisa (1741): A Ballad Textscape

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What place does so utterly quotidian and unadorned a specimen of *Skandinavische Schriftlandschaften* as this unremarkable-looking mid-18th century title page of a printed ballad have in a collection to honor so special a colleague as Professor Jürg Glauser? Therein lies a tale. As it happens, this wayward copy of *En Galant Giönge=Wisa* has proved to be unique – the ballad is otherwise unknown either to the check lists of Svenskt Visarkiv (at least when I examined them decades ago) or to Margareta Jersild's 1975 study of older printed chapbooks in Sweden. Adding to this *skillingstryck*'s significance and unique history, it turned up, not in an antiquarian bookshop in Scandinavia, nor in a regional Nordic archive, nor at a *loppis-marknad* somewhere in Sweden, but rather as part of a bound collection of Swedish chapbooks in Harvard University's Widener Library, one of the largest academic libraries in the world.

That this little text had found its way to Harvard in the 19th century appears to have been a result of the deep interest shown by Francis James Child, best known for his canonical five-volume *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-1898), and later, his successor, George Lyman Kittredge, in the Nordic ballad material and the scholarship developed for its study, especially as represented in the work of Svend Grundtvig. That interest led in turn to their efforts to secure good examples of Nordic ballads for the Harvard libraries through the purchase of large numbers of chapbooks from Nordic book dealers, of which this text would appear to be an example.¹

In a further fortuitous, and, as it turned out, highly felicitous turn of events, the text came to the attention of Professor Nils-Arvid Bringéus during a visit by him to Harvard some years ago. From that chance encounter came Bringéus' masterful dissection of the history and background of this ballad text and its connections to 18th-century Lund (Bringéus, 2000). The small but impressive window thus opened onto the cultural, intellectual and linguistic situation of mid-18th-century. Skåne, then a Swedish province for less than one hundred years, should alone secure a place among *Skandinavische Schriftlandschaften* for *En Galant Giönge=Wisa*, its humble-looking title page notwithstanding.

¹ On the hundreds of early Swedish and Danish chapbooks in the Harvard libraries, see Mitchell, 1991: 270, and 2012: 114.

Bringéus' valuable observations about the ballad suggest yet another reason for including it in a collection of this sort, namely, that performance, writ large, is an area where further research on such a text might prove fruitful. And to be sure, this short ballad – composed of just 18 verses, some 700 words or so – does indeed manage to provide a strong sense of its purported setting, of a humble hops dealer selling his wares, of a wedding feast, of dancing, of represented speech, of performance in the most fundamental sense, yet the text, almost certainly written by Pehr Lovén (born in Loshult socken in Östra Göinge), is itself another kind of performance, one which combines the future clergyman's ethnographic eye, with which he captures the traditions of song and dance in his home tract, and his ambition of crafting a poem that would capture his sentiments about his former home, a view shared later in that same decade by Carl von Linné, who described the "Gyinge" residents as "et hyggeligt, muntert, tilltagset och wigt folk" ("an agreeable, merry, cheeky and quick people") (Linné, 1751: 408; my translation).

Indeed, the product that results from this meeting of Scanian cultural traditions and a sympathetic, educated member of the community creating a text based on memories of past activities is strongly reminiscent of a similar situation centuries earlier in Iceland, described and analyzed by Jürg Glauser in a series of works (e.g., Glauser, 2007; 2010), in which he addresses, *inter alia*, the meeting of memory and mediality, and of "moments when – using the medium of writing – the emergence of fiction is conceptualised" (Glauser, 2010: 333). Despite being draped in relative obscurity for its first 250 years, *En Galant Giöngge=Wisa* revealed on its (re)discovery that it, modest though it might be, is every bit as likely to embody these truths as are the sagas of the Middle Ages.

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