CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PIETISM AND COMMUNITY IN MAGNUS FRIEDRICH ROOS’S DIALOGUE BOOKS

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Pietist pedagogical fiction

In the history of the Christian Church, fictional stories have been very influential in spiritual direction and pastoral care. John Bunyan’s books comprising *The Pilgrim’s Progress from this World to that which is to Come* (1678, 1684) are the most well-known. But, because of their Reformed heritage, they never became popular in strictly Lutheran circles. The typical Pietist novel in Scandinavia, or rather the Pietist substitute for novels, was *Menoza, en Asiatsk Prints, som reste verlden omkring, för at söka christna, i synnerhet uti Indien, Spanien, Italien, Frankrike, Engeland, Holland, Tyskland och Dännemark, men fant litet af thet han sökte* (1742–1743) by the Danish bishop Erik Pontoppidan. This travel book is an epistolary novel of 56 letters, dealing especially with the Pietist interpretation of salvation.

Other representative examples of fiction read in Lutheran circles may be found in the so-called dialogue books by the Württemberg Pietist prelate Magnus Friedrich Roos (1727–1803) with edifying conversations between fictitious persons. These dialogue books have been preserved and are read up to this day in Sweden, some of them in three successive translations, since Roos was regarded as an author in full conformity with the domestic Schartau tradition. The tradition from Henric Schartau (1757–1825), preacher in Lund cathedral and rural dean, was most extensive and prominent in the diocese of Gothenburg in the late nineteenth century.¹ It has been characterized as a combination of Lutheran Orthodox High Church understanding of church, ministry,

and sacraments, and Pietist elements, particularly in its teaching on conversion and the individual application of grace and faith, with a very detailed *ordo salutis*. In this tradition, religious societies were severely rejected, since the local congregation and the household were the only theologically accepted forms of collective community. Pietist books were commonly criticized, with the almost only exception of Magnus Friedrich Roos. But the reading of Roos was not limited to this tradition. His books were also read in the Evangelical revival, in 1856 organized in the Swedish Evangelical Mission (Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen), which published a number of his titles.²

In this article, I would like to point out that Roos’s books contributed to the forming of the community models of the Schartau tradition in its special combination of Orthodox principles based on the household, and Pietist conceptions or motivations based on the individual faith.

Since these dialogue books dealt with fictitious persons and their relations in everyday life, they also served as a substitute for novels and fiction that were generally rejected in Pietist traditions. This reading may be compared to the private use of published instructions for correspondence, in which constructed love-letters were read as substitutes for the forbidden love novels.³ In a model for a spiritual letter to a pastor, Roos, in *Christliche Gespräche für Landleute*, has a writer address himself to God, to the pastor, and to himself.⁴

The pedagogical dialogue was developed in the Middle Ages as a scholastic variant of expository dialogue. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the dialogue became “a favorite genre of Enlightenment writers.” The most ambitious dialogues of this period are probably the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) by David Hume.⁵ It may well be that some of Roos’s dialogues were written as a direct reaction to Hume or other Enlightenment dialogues. He may well have been inspired by a chapter in Johann Jakob Rambach’s *Betrachtungen über auserlesene heylsame Worte des Herrn Jesu* (Jena, 1733) or by Nico-

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² M.F. Roos, *Soldat-samtal, afsedda att bland krigarebeståndet befordra gudaktighet* (Stockholm, 1862); M.F. Roos, *Inledning till bibliska historien från skapelsen till Abrahams tid* (Stockholm, 1863).


⁴ [Magnus Friedrich Roos,] *Christelige Samtal för Landtfolk, jemte Några märkvardiga Händelser* (Gothenburg, 1823), pp. 60–62.