

STORY COLLECTIONS, FRAME NARRATIVES, AND SCHWÄNKE:  
FROM THE LATE MIDDLE AGES TO THE EARLY MODERN AGE

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*Abstract:*

*Research has traditionally drawn direct lines of influence from Boccaccio's Decameron and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales to storytellers from the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Goethe, Brentano, Jan Potocki, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Edith Wharton, J. R. R. Tolkien, etc.), commonly skipping centuries of literary history in-between. Surprisingly, however, the genre of frame stories or jest narrative collection was strongly developed also by numerous German and Italian poets (Johannes Pauli, Georg Wickram, Gian Francesco Straparola), but their works have been mostly overlooked in that context.*

*As important as Boccaccio's contribution was for future literary history, this paper argues that we must not neglect the works by major sixteenth-century writers who developed their own entertaining and didactic literature and relied heavily on the concept of the frame story, often inspired by Boccaccio. This approach also opens new perspectives toward vernacular narratives composed neither in a humanist vein nor under the influence of the Protestant Reformation. In particular, those vast and highly popular story collections belong to a period that tends to be overlooked both by medievalists and Baroque specialists because they occupy a sort of 'third space,' entertaining and instructing at the same time.*

*Abstract:*

*In der Forschung hat man gemeinhin direkte Verbindungslinien zwischen Boccaccios Decameron und Chaucer's Canterbury Tales einerseits und Geschichtenerzählern des frühen neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts gezogen (Goethe, Brentano, Jan Potocki, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Edith Wharton, J. R. R. Tolkien, etc.), dabei aber gewöhnlich die Literaturgeschichte in den dazwischenliegenden Jahrhundert übersehen. Es trifft aber zu, dass bereits viele deutsche und italienische Schwänkeautoren (Johannes Pauli, Georg Wickram, Gian Francesco Straparola) genau diese Technik der Rahmenerzählung (unter leichten Abstrichen) entwickelt hatten, ohne dass dies die modernen Literaturwissenschaftler überhaupt bemerkt hätten.*

*So wichtig auch Boccaccios Beiträge für die folgende Literaturgeschichte waren, gilt dennoch zu beachten, was diese Studie nachweisen möchte, dass bereits viele Erzähler des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts ihre eigenen unterhaltsamen und didaktisch instruktiven Text verfasst hatten, mehr oder weniger auch unter Rückgriff auf Boccaccio. Diese Werke gehören weder zur humanistischen noch zur religiös-protestantischen Literature, waren aber extrem populär zu ihrer Zeit. Dennoch wurden sie bisher stark missachtet, weil sie sozusagen einen "third space" einnahmen und sowohl Unterhaltung als auch Belehrung boten.*

*Keywords: Frame stories; sixteenth-century German literature; Johannes Pauli; Georg Wickram; Hans-Wilhelm Kirchhoff; entertaining and didactic narratives*

## 1. Introduction

Storytelling belongs to the oldest literary art in the history of humankind. We as people deeply enjoy telling each other stories in which human misbehavior, foolishness, and misfortune matter centrally. It would be difficult to identify any culture where there would not have been an interest in this narrative strategy, to mirror all of life in texts, presented in the public or in writing. Storytelling involves groups of listeners and the storyteller, which altogether reflects the vast world of oral poetry (see, e.g., Attridge 2019; Porter 2022). In other words, it is regularly a communal event in which the audience and the singer/teller engage with their shared values and ideals, establish a certain degree of consensus regarding ethics and morality, and join in the literary entertainment. Storytelling hence creates some of the essential bonds of human society, as many centuries of literary history have already confirmed.

Ironically, however, the present world, especially in the West, seems to be much less interested in this literary activity, perhaps because the internet has atomized us all to such an extent that we have lost the sense of social cohesion and community. Nevertheless, until today at a book launch, for instance, many people assemble; at book fairs, many times public readings take place, and there are numerous book clubs, both in person and on the internet. Children are often exposed to readings by their teachers; only at a later age, they are encouraged to read by themselves, which is thus the beginning of social isolation, as important that reading skill certainly is. The tradition of oral storytelling has always constituted a cornerstone of most cultures, so we might wonder what these recent changes in behavior toward literature might have to tell us about our current societies, at least in the West (Bauer 1977; cf. now Elder 2023; for reading in biblical contexts; see Baetens 2021 [orig. 2016] for contemporary issues).

There is, however, an intriguing parallel phenomenon that might confirm, at least indirectly, the continuous need for and interest in storytelling in the twenty-first century. While the film industry seemed to have experienced a dramatic decline since the 1990s, with increasing numbers of people watching videos or movies by themselves at home (Netflix, etc.; cf. Newman 2014), the current situation of movie theaters appears to indicate a strong upsurge in the number of audiences that enjoy the communal experience of watching a movie over the watching a film back home. The general disinclination to sit down and listen to a reader who presents to a larger audience, at least today, might be a self-imposed loss of culture. If my assessment of the renewed movie culture might hold true, however, the interest in storytelling as an art might well return again (for some data, see

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2023/08/10/barbenheimer-breaks-box-office-records-are-theaters-making-comeback/70562644007/>; or <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/02/25/movie-theaters-evolving-not-dying.html>; both last accessed on Oct. 16, 2023).

Storytelling does not simply come about impromptu without any planning; instead, as we may assume, it is often intentionally framed by an extradiegetic strategy, with some comments by the author about the conditions that made the reading or telling event possible in the first place, thus creating an intratextual space. Most famously, the Arabic *One Thousand and One Nights* set the stage for this universal phenomenon, but we could also refer to much older models, such as the Indian or Persian *Kalila and Dimna*, or the *History of the Seven Wise Men* (Irwin 1994/2010; Fuchs 2023; Thompson, ed., 2022; Thomson, ed., 2020). The late Middle Ages witnessed a considerable growth of story collections, such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1350), Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1400) (cf. Gittes 1991), Franco Sacchetti's *Novelle* (ca. 1400), and Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* (1558/1559) (Gerber 2015). Major predecessors were the Anglo-Norman *lais* by Marie de France (ca. 1190), the verse narratives by the Middle High German poet The Stricker, particularly his *Pfaffe Amîs* (ca. 1230), the Old French *fabliaux* (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries), the Old Spanish *Libro de los ejemplos del conde Lucanor y de Patronio* (Book of the Examples of Count Lucanor and of Patronio) by Don Juan Manuel (1335), the large body of late medieval German verse narratives (*mæren*; fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), and various major collections of didactic and entertaining tales, such as Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis* (early twelfth century) and the *Dialogus miraculorum* by Caesarius of Heisterbach (ca. 1220) (cf. Grubmüller 2006). Depending on the survival of the text collections in manuscripts and incunabula, we encounter at times frame stories, but that is not always the case, as we know of the stories by Heinrich Kaufringer (ca. 1400) (Classen, trans., 2014/2019; see the introduction with its emphasis on the global context of this genre) and many other composers of *mæren* (verse narratives).

In numerous cases, the author either provides a narrative frame which explains the circumstances of the storytelling event or offers general comments about morality, ethics, religion, and social values underlying the literary effort, which then creates a sort of frame after all. Recently, Kleinschmidt and Japp have edited a volume based on a conference held at the University of Frankfurt in 2016 addressing the phenomenon of the framing story (Kleinschmidt and Japp 2018). They assert that literary scholarship has increasingly paid attention to this narrative model (which seems questionable), but then they themselves move too quickly from Boccaccio and Chaucer to Marguerite de Navarre and Goethe. Subsequently, Jan Söffner focuses on Boccaccio, and Andrew James Johnston discusses Chaucer as the best-known

examples. The next two contributions engage with Giambattista Basile (1634; Christine Ott) and Paul Scarron (1651 and 1657; Frank Estelmann), whereas all other authors focus on the classical writer Goethe and Romantic and later authors (19th and 20th centuries), a common strategy or methodology by current literary scholarship (Jäggi 1994). Kleinschmidt concludes the volume with an epilogue in which he highlights the major features of the frame narrative once again, repeating mostly what he had observed in the introduction, but he does not go beyond the slim selection of the most famous poets, thus he leaves out the entire and truly crucial period of the sixteenth century. Surprisingly, there is not even a word about the significant anonymous collection *Les Cent Nouvelle Nouvelles* (ca. 1460; cf. Azuela 2006) or of *Le Piacevoli Notti* by the Venetian Giovan Francesco Straparola (*The Pleasant Nights*, 1550), which critically promoted the genre and also laid the foundation for the early modern fairy tale (Straparola 2015).

We could agree with the observation that the frame narrative establishes a dynamic relationship between the presenter/reader and the audience (Kleinschmidt 2018, 290), but why would the frame also create heterogeneity and conflicts due to the many interpretive options (290), when the opposite actually seems to be the case with the narrator establishing his or her authority and providing guidelines for the reading/listening experience (cf. my review, *Literaturkritik.de*, Feb. 18, 2019, online at: [https://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez\\_id=25356](https://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=25356))?

With regard to the frame narrative and also the large collections of entertaining jest narratives in the history of western literature, much work is still waiting for us to address major desiderata in that regard (see, for a slightly different focus, Reitzenstein 2020, but he only includes Marguerite de Navarre; otherwise, he deals with modern authors). Even entries in standard lexica or encyclopedia do not present the full picture, regularly jumping much too quickly from the late Middle Ages (Boccaccio, Chaucer, Marguerite de Navarre) to the age of Goethe and the Romantics (Hübner 1990), as if there was a huge vacuum from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Belcher (2003) offers a wider perspective, focusing especially on the long tradition of *Kalila and Dimna* (including translations by Petrus Alfonsi and Don Juan Manuel), but in terms of western frame stories, he also limits himself to fleeting references to Boccaccio, Chaucer, Marguerite de Navarre, Straparola, and Basile.

If this more extensive article in the authoritative *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* is any indication, we truly face a dearth of more critical studies on early modern frame narratives, which this article wants to address at least in part. Of course, the concept of the frame will have to be viewed more loosely, especially because the tradition of the *Schwankliteratur*, our topic here, operates somewhat differently in theoretical and methodological terms. However, major early modern German collections of jest narratives strongly suggest that significant connections exist between them and

famous role models such as the *Decameron* or *The Canterbury Tales*, even if the intradiegetic voices do not appear there as clearly as in those two famous collections.

## 2. Early Moder German Story Collections

Leaving some of the interpretive problems aside for a moment, the real issue that needs to be addressed here consists of the large body of late medieval German text collections that is commonly ignored. This paper intends to take into consideration the theoretical statements by influential and highly popular writers such as Johannes Pauli, Georg Wickram, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof, and others (Röcke 1991; Classen 2009), commonly ignored even by recent scholarship (Reinhart, ed., 2007; Kleinschmidt and Japp, ed., 2018) and thus will uncover the strong continuity of the medieval narrative traditions far into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Classen forthcoming). Emmelius (2010) has already illustrated the notion of sociability contained in these larger collections of verse or prose narratives from the late Middle Ages and the early modern age, but we still need to investigate the theoretical concepts underlying those major works. The notion of the narrative frame needs to be handled more flexibly in light of the contributions by sixteenth-century German writers who commonly offer prologues and similar comments to explain their approaches but who do not situate their texts into a meta-text in which extradiegetic storytellers operate. Nevertheless, these large collections of jest narratives ought to be studied in the wider context of the late medieval tradition (Boccaccio, Chaucer, etc.) because of the intricate interactions between the storyteller and his (!) audience and the narrative strategies to instrumentalize the texts for entertainment and instruction purposes (cf. Kipf 2010 for some reflections on genre categories, but he ignores the genre of jest narratives).

## 3. Johannes Pauli

The Franciscan preacher and author Johannes Pauli was born in the Alsace (perhaps in Thann, northwest of Mulhouse) around 1450/1454 and died there around 1522 (Pauli 1924/1972). In 1479, Paul joined the Franciscan Order in Thann, and worked fairly widely as a preacher and official of his Order in Southwestern Germany in Villingen (1490–1494), Basel (1498), Bern (1503/1504), Strasbourg (1504–1510), Schlettstadt (1515), and Thann (since 1519). He gained major notoriety through his edition of the sermons by the popular preacher Geiler von Kaysersberg (1445–1510) and especially through the publication of his own most influential collection of comic and religious stories, *Schimpf und Ernst* (first appeared in 1522) (Mühlherr 1993).

Those prose narratives served primarily for the purpose of making sermons

more lively, so we can assume that the author specifically targeted members of his own Order, preachers, noblemen, and a generally educated urban audience. The anthology contains 693 short prose narratives, 231 of them with serious content, and 462 determined by humor, though both aspects are intimately intertwined. Pauli drew much inspiration from classical Latin literature, the Bible, and a variety of medieval sources – there are at least forty sources, such as Valerius Maximus, Caesarius of Heisterbach, the anonymous author of the *Gesta Romanorum*, Francesco Petrarca and Hermann Bote (*Eulenspiegel*). Many times, however, Pauli simply relied on his own experiences or oral anecdotes.

For Pauli, the world was in very bad shape; people were losing their morality and ethics, and so he regarded it as his urgent task to admonish them to return to the proper path, for which the literary discourse appeared to be most effective. In fact, Pauli proved to be a supreme storyteller who successfully appealed to ever-new audiences over the next two hundred years and more. As the very first story signals, truth is no longer desired, and those who tell it are badly punished by the liars, deceivers, and criminals. Hence, this large collection served him as a literary medium to teach, to entertain, and to admonish his ecclesiastical and other contemporaries, reviving the ancient concept of “prodesse et delectare” (Horace) and also the grand tradition of storytelling by Boccaccio, Chaucer, Kaufringer, and others. Pauli also encouraged others to contribute to future editions and to improve his book (prologue) (Pearsall 1994; Classen 2003).

*Schimpf und Ernst* begins with a summary statement below the title and a preface. The volume, however, is not bookended with an epilogue, though the last story, no. 693, identified as “Ernst” (earnest) offers a kind of final comment on how to forgive people, how to establish peace, and to replace hatred with love. The title page is primarily focused on asserting that the stories contained in this volume are both serious in nature and entertaining at the same time, “Nuetzlich und guot zuo Besserung der Menschen” (Profitable and good for the improvement of people). The woodcut shows a preacher holding a book in his left hand, with the right hand pointing toward the audience, which consists of men and women of various social classes who either listen to the preacher/speaker or debate issues apparently raised by the storyteller. The majority of people, however, look down reflecting, so it seems, the messages presented to them.

In his preface, Pauli observes that many different authors have published a variety of books that have confused people’s minds (“Irrungen,” 3), detracting them away from eternal blissfulness and a peaceful life. The author wants to bring his listeners back to Christ and His grace by way of presenting a wide range of stories that he has collected in many different books during his forty years of preaching. Following the biblical word, he encourages his listeners to pick up the crumbs of

wisdom and to consider them closely.

Specifically, Pauli addresses the ‘spiritual children’ in the monasteries whom he wants to provide with some entertaining reading material to relax their minds and find some rest since it would not be possible for anyone always to pursue serious religious studies. The author also hopes to reach members of the nobility who live in their castles and would need a sort of wake-up call to remember their own ideals and values. The stories contained in *Schimpf und Ernst* would present funny, scary, and also serious topics, and listening to them, or reading them would trigger a spiritual reform. Pauli also hopes that his collection would help preachers to reach out more effectively toward their audiences (“schlefferlichen Menschen,” 3; sleepy people), offering delightful literary material but with honorable content.

However, the author is worried that his volume could be misunderstood and decried, perhaps as consisting of nothing but erotic or adventurous entertainment. His true purpose would be to improve people in their morality and ethics. All his stories would be decent (“zimen,” 4) although he selected them from a vast corpus of often ill-conceived and vile narratives, maybe of sexual or violent content. Appealing to his audience’s kindness, he begs for forgiveness in case he might have made a mistake in choosing a bad story.

The next page offers another brief summary of the intent of *Schimpf und Ernst*, to be delightful and profitable so that every reader/listener could derive useful examples and teachings that would be “nuetzlich und guot” (5; useful and good). Thereupon, the storytelling sets in, beginning with tales about the decline of the public appreciation of truth. While the first story deals with a fool who always reveals to his master what the other servants do during their lord’s absence, for which he gets a severe beating by those very servants, the third one alerts the audience that always telling truth might become troublesome and harmful. There would be many situations in which it would be advisable simply to keep quiet and thus to avoid hurting people’s feeling. As he emphasizes: “Die Warheit ist so edel, das sie nit von allen Menschen an allen Orten zu allen Zeiten sol gesagt werden” (9; Truth is such a noble matter that it should not be spoken by all people at all places and at all times).

There are ninety sections, with 693 tales altogether, and the author takes the opportunity to address a wide range of topics, such as the Fourth Commandment (III, to honor one’s parents), fools (IV), the devil (VIII), ignorant people (IX), horse swindlers (X), honorable wives (XII), arrogance (XV), greed (XVI), usury (XII), drunkenness (XXI), death (XXV), confession (XXIX), prayer (XXXIV), innkeepers (XLII), flatterers (XLIV), friendship (LIII), patience (LXI), gratitude (LXXXIX), and war (XC). Undoubtedly, religious themes dominate, but this does not distract from the overarching concern to instruct, illuminate, and entertain in literary or narrative terms.

There are considerable differences to previous story collections such as Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, especially because no individual storytellers appear intradiegetically, but overall, *Schimpf und Ernst* also addresses the wide gamut of human concerns, troubles, failures, shortcomings, foolishness, and sinfulness. The language is simplistic, the texts often introduced with the standard formula, 'Once there was a person who....,' and concluding with an epimythium, a moral interpretation of the events or people presented in the story. For instance, the 270th *Schimpf* – the numbers do not differentiate between *Schimpf* and *Ernst* – concludes with the general observation that people tend to impose collective guilt on their perpetrators and expect their friends to do the same, unjustly. Finally, the narrator sums it all up with a final comment: "Huet dich vor Neid und zuo vil Einfaltikeit" (173; Abstain from envy and too much simple-mindedness). The 275th *Schimpf* talks briefly about a miserly man who is about to die. A priest tries to give him the last rites, but at that moment, after a long period of silence in his life, the man suddenly speaks up and asks who might try to steal his purse and commands that the thieves be expelled. The author has nothing to add but the brief comment: "Sein Hertz was auch me in dem Seckel dan bei dem Sacrament" (175; His heart was more focused on the purse than on the sacrament).

In a very different context, we learn of a conflict between a young medical doctor and his stepmother who does not like him. When the father gets sick, his son provides him with medicine that cures him within a few days. But when the stepmother falls ill, the young man refuses to assist because he knows only too well that the father had recovered his health more through the trust in his son's expertise and love for him than through the medicine. The stepmother, by contrast, would distrust him and fear that he would prescribe a dangerous potion, "darumb so mag ich sie nit gesunt machen" (217; for that reason, I cannot recover her health). The commentator then concludes with the general observation "Darumb die Hoffnung, die ein kranck Mensch hat zuo dem Artzet, das ist ein grose Ursach der Gesuntheit" (217; Hence, the hope [trust] that a person has in the doctor is the major cause of health).

The structural pattern is evident; the storyteller presents a unique case, explicates it, then reaches a conclusion, and rounds off the tale with a universal statement, such as "Also ist es noch uff Erdtreich" (228; This is the way how things operate here on earth). Curiously, the very last story about a murder case that is resolved by forgiveness lacks such an epimythium, and we are assumed to understand the implied message by ourselves. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* also lacks the conclusion, and the same pertains to Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*, so we should not identify the metadiegetic introduction with a host or a group of people deciding on the storytelling event itself. More important seems to be that the collection itself operates as a holistic entity addressing larger audiences engaging with them by means of entertainment and instruction. In this regard, both Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst*



and many other sixteenth-century German collections of jest narratives ought to be considered as integral contributions to the same genre initiated by Boccaccio and Chaucer, if not, much earlier, by Petrus Alfonsi, Caesarius of Heisterbach, The Stricker, and the anonymous author of the *Gesta Romanorum*.

#### 4. *Till Eulenspiegel*

Pauli drew from a vast variety of sources, and one of them was the collection of tales about the rogue and prankster Till Eulenspiegel (Dil Ulenspiegel), who also enjoyed an enormous popularity throughout the sixteenth century, and ever since in many different iterations. First printed in Strasbourg by Johannes Grüninger in 1510/1511, *Till Eulenspiegel* quickly experienced a huge success in the early modern book market (Gotzkwowski 1991, 468–88). In contrast to Pauli's approach with a multitude of different kinds of stories about many problems in human existence, Hermann Bote, a toll official in the city of Brunswick in northern German and the presumed composer of that text, traces the life of this unusual character who does nothing else but fool people, cause them some harm (never a major crime), transgress the social, ethical, and moral norms, and ridicule virtually everyone, except children. We can follow the character from his earliest days (baptism) to his death, and we are constantly invited to laugh about his pranks through which he manages to expose people's failures and ignorance, arrogance and greed, stupidity and naiveté.

There are some historical indications that Till Eulenspiegel might have been a verifiable individual, born in Kneitlingen on the Elm around 1300, and died in Mölln in 1350. Very similar to Pauli, who obviously enjoyed the teachings of Eulenspiegel, Bote developed his collection of biographical tales to entertain and instruct his audience. In this regard, he apparently followed the model provided already by the Middle High German poet The Stricker, his *Pfaffe Amîs* (ca. 1240; cf. Peters 1977; Ziegeler 1995; Classen 2022), although each story can easily be read by itself since there are no direct thematic connections, apart from the ongoing playing of tricks on people (for a variety of insightful studies on this text, see Blume 2009).

The anonymous narrator (Bote?) emphasizes in the frontispiece that his book offers a "kurzweilig Lesen von Dil Ulenspiegel" (Ulenspiegel, 5), based on the life of that rogue, which is a partial parallel with Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst*, although the term "Schimpf" is not used here. The author, hiding behind the acronym "N," possibly Hermann Bote (ca. 1450–1525), announces in the prologue that he intends to relate the "Historien und Geschichten" (7; histories and accounts) of a peasant's son, Dil Ulenspiegel, who lived in the ducal territory of Braunschweig. He was motivated to do so by the request of various people who were interested in the pranks by this "behend, listig[ ] und durchtriben[ ]" (7; skillful, clever, and devious) person. In the

expectation of gaining those people's respect and reward, the author wrote down those accounts.

Considering the many scatological and other transgressive tales contained in this collection, it seems rather shocking that an elite audience might have requested the author to create a literary work of such a kind. However, the cultural sensitivity concerning the human body and its effluents was certainly different in the early modern period compared both to the high Middle Ages and us today (Persels and Grimm, ed. 2004; Smith 2012). The narrator is concerned, however, that his efforts might create some criticism because the literary character Eulenspiegel was rather infamous for his roguish behavior as he displayed it in various cities, obviously hurting and ridiculing the very audience that had commissioned Bote to produce that work. The narrator pleads with his audience not to take any of the evil examples as intentionally insulting to anyone ("Widerdrieß," 7).

Most importantly, Bote rationalizes his literary efforts with a reference to the tough times that make people feel unhappy or distressed. Listening to the hilarious stories about Eulenspiegel would hence serve "ein frölich Gemüt zu machen" (7; to create a happy mood), and this by way of the "Schimpf," as Pauli and many other contemporaries formulated it. Intriguingly, the author identifies his collection primarily for a reading audience that would enjoy those texts during or after dinner, that is, at a time that would not collide with the Mass. Hence, *Dil Ulenspiegel* was not to compete with the religious service and should be consumed along with the new wine (8). Quite similarly as Pauli, Bote urges his readers to intervene in his texts and to shorten or to lengthen them, as they would deem it necessary, which is all predicated on the notion of the humility topos. He apologized to his audience for his use of the vernacular, Early Modern Low German, since he was not trained in writing in Latin ("ein schlechter Lei bin," 8; I am an unlearned layperson).

The tales in *Dil Ulenspiegel* all speak for themselves and do not offer any moral or ethical teachings; they are not didactic in their intent. However, in many cases, we still can identify critical comments about arrogant priests, haughty princes, foolish craftsmen, and silly women. People are too naive and gullible for sensational news, for instance, so when Eulenspiegel announces that he would fly like a bird from the top of the city hall. Everyone quickly assembles to watch this 'miracle,' but in the last moment Eulenspiegel announces that no human being could fly and that the audience deserves to be laughed at for their foolishness: "Ich meinte, es wär kein Thor oder Nar mer in der Welt dann ich. So sih ich wol, daz hier schier die gantze Stat vol Thoren ist. . . ." (43; I had thought that there would not be anyone in the world who is more a fool or rogue than me. Now I see well that the entire city is full of fools). Some people in the audience curse at him, but others laugh because they realize that he has said the truth (43).

However, apart from the last story about his curious burial, and a final epitaph showing an owl and a mirror, there is no narrative comment, and we are left with the burlesque stories by themselves although they trace a sort of biographical line from Eulenspiegel's birth to his death. In an intriguing way, instruction and entertainment intertwine here, which was, of course, already the major concern of medieval storytellers, including those who composed *fabliaux* and *mæren*.

## 5. Georg Wickram

The first major author to imitate the generic concept as developed by Pauli – here disregarding the unique *Dil Ulenspiegel* and also the much older *Pfaffe Amîs* by The Stricker – was Georg Wickram who is famous for his collection of tales under the title *Rollwagenbüchlein* (1555; The Little Book for the Traveling Coach). Georg, or Jörg Wickram was born as the illegitimate son of the Colmar citizen Conrad Wickram ca. 1505, which was to become a social blemish that impacted his entire life since this situation denied him the right ever to rise on the social ladder to an advanced position within any city administration (as enjoyed by his father, for instance). However, Wickram was extremely successful as the composer of religious plays, novels, Shrovetide plays, some songs in the vein of the Meistersinger (master craftsmen singers), and didactic texts (Kleinschmidt 1993; Müller 2007; Classen 2023). Parallel to Pauli, Wickram introduces his collection with a general prologue explaining the intentions and purposes with this book (Wickram 1984, from which I will quote; see also Wickram 1973, which offers the same text edition but then adds a comprehensive apparatus for the various text variations in subsequent prints).

His emphasis rests on the novelty and innovation of his stories, “neüws / vor vnerhoerts Buechlein” (5; new and until now unheard-of little book). But he resorts to the terms “schwenk” (5; jest narrative) and “Historien” (5; historical accounts), that is, to narratives that are commonly shared among travelers on ships, on the roads, in barber shops, and bathhouses. The intention is not, as he emphasizes, to provide moral or ethical instructions; instead, he wants to divert the audience, “zuo langweiligen zeiten erzellen” (5; to tell stories during boring hours). Wickram wants to provide help in the case of melancholy, which is certainly a shared motivation with Boccaccio, Chaucer, or Marguerite de Navarre, or the collection of *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*.

Subsequently, Wickram offers another extensive introductory commentary, his dedication, addressing his patron, Martin Neuen, citizen of Colmar, trying to demonstrate his gratitude, or attempting to avoid the grave danger of the lack of the same virtue (7). Again, he resorts to another humility topos regarding the insignificance of his work which only intends to offer “guote[ ] kurtzweil” (7; good entertainment). Maybe out of fear of hurting anyone's feelings, especially in light of

Wickram's uncertain social status as a bastard, he adds the further comment: "niemants zuo underweysung noch leer, auch gar niemandts zuo schmach, hon oder spott, wie ir dann selbs wol sehen unnd lesen werden" (7; not for the instruction of anyone, not to humiliate anyone, to mock, or ridicule any reader, as you will see for yourself and read it). However, he then adds a significant political argument, suggesting that his patron would profit from his little book because it would offer so many entertaining accounts that could be easily presented to high-ranking visitors, both ecclesiastics and worldly lords (7).

With these stories, it would be possible to entertain good lords and friends while traveling (8), which immediately reminds us of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in which the pilgrimage served as the external framework for the storytelling. Both here and there, the author addresses the problem of empty time, of boredom, which the narrator attempts to overcome with his entertaining stories. However, he also claims that his tales would not irritate anyone, that they would be free from moral indecency or any shamefulness: "on allen anstoß" (8; without causing any irritation). The prologue, or rather dedication, concludes with his best wishes for his patron and his newlywed wife upon the occasion of the celebration of the new year (8).

Subsequently, Wickram offers yet another address to the reader at large, reminding him or her that sometimes risqué stories ought to be told only on a ship or in a coach so as to observe some privacy away from society at large (9). We would call this a 'trigger-warning' today, although for the author it serves more as a humility topos and defense strategy in case some of his texts might be considered offensive in social terms. Interestingly, he uses different words than Pauli, referring to "schampere und schandtliche wort" (9; shameful and demeaning words), though he dismisses all that because during travel people of both genders would be present, and his stories would address, after all, possibly morally dubious topics. Nevertheless, he wants to stay away from "zotten" (9; dirty jokes) and intends to substitute the ordinary conversation by uneducated and undisciplined people with his own stories that promise "kurtzweilige[ ] gesprech" (9; entertaining narratives) and good entertainment of a dignified matter ("ergetzen," 9; to enjoy). Only then does he describe his tales more specifically and approximates hereby Pauli's model: "kurtzweilig und schimpfliche schwenck" (9; diverting and fun accounts). He assures his readers/listeners that no one would feel irritated about them (10). However, in a subtle and yet specific manner he still alerts his audience that some of them might feel criticized, though for good reasons, which thus implies the didactic element we know so well from *Schimpf und Ernst*. In order to explain this specific message, Wickram cites the well-known proverb that only those dogs would bark who would be hit by a stick – in the sense that if one were to throw a stick into a band of dogs, only those would bark who would be hit (10).

Although a majority of his tales target peasants and their crude and foolish behavior, Wickram also ridicules monks, priests, members of the nobility, merchants, lansquenets, horse traders (swindlers), lawyers, drunkards, Jews, married couples, barbers, and students. There is no epilogue, so we cannot determine further how Wickram conceived his collection of stories, though the overarching themes are obvious. Here as well, the butt of the joke tend to be peasants, but also priests, and other people.

Misunderstandings, excessive consumption of alcohol, ignorance, and stupidity dominate as themes. Just one example should suffice to gain a good understanding of Wickram's approach and general outlook with his tales. In the 63rd story, an arrogant monk is in charge of performing the Mass. Although he has a very poor voice, he believes that he is an excellent singer, and all members of the parish believe that he has basically lost his mind. One day, the monk observes a widow who responds to his singing with crying and wringing of her hands. Believing that his own beautiful voice has moved her to this emotional reaction, he enquires about the reasons for her dramatic reaction, hoping to be lauded and rewarded by her. However, she only tells him that her donkey had died recently, and the monk's screeching voice had reminded her of the poor animal.

The narrator offers, similarly as Pauli, a brief commentary: "Also geschicht noch gemeinlich allen rhuomgierigen; wann sy vermeinen, grossen rhuom zuo erlangen, kummend sy ettwann zuo allergroessistem spott" (116; This is the way as it happens to all those strongly desiring public fame; once they believe to have received great honor, they fall victim to the greatest mockery).

The first edition of Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein* from 1555 concludes with the 67th story; later editions expanded on that with similar stories. Throughout, however, the author does not go much beyond brief comments about how to interpret the actions and words of individuals, although the implied criticism is always quite obvious. We can thus conclude that this author more or less followed the model set up by Pauli, though he refrained from formulating more direct attacks against certain individuals or social classes. We are consistently invited to laugh about foolish behavior and words, but there is not much sarcasm or biting humor. Instead, Wickram offers a wider panorama of life in the middle of the sixteenth century by highlighting ignorance and stupidity (for a social-historical analysis, see Wåghäll Nivre 2004).

His multi-part prologue served different purposes, both to appeal to his patron and to protect himself from unwanted criticism concerning possible transgressive language or topics. In contrast to Pauli, who was, after all, a Franciscan preacher, Wickram barely addressed religious issues, though he was just as much interested in moral and ethical shortcomings as his predecessor.

## 6. Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof

The lansquenet, mayor, forester, and administrator (castellan) Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof (1525–1625) had a big influence on late sixteenth-century jest narrative literature, and in his *Wendunmuth* (first publication in 1563, and many times thereafter (1573, 1581, 1589, 1602, 1603, and then again in 1869), he drew extensively from the frame story tradition and produced seven volumes with his entertaining and didactic tales (Gotzkowsky 1993, 513–16; I have also consulted the online bibliography VD17, covering the entire seventeenth century, at: [https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=1.28/CMD?MATCFILTER=N&MATCSET=N&NOSCAN=N&IKT0=&TRM0=&ACT3=\\* &IKT3=8183&ACT=SRCHA&IKT=1016&SR T=YOP&ADI\\_BIB=&TRM=Wendunmuth%20&REC=\\* &TRM3=](https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=1.28/CMD?MATCFILTER=N&MATCSET=N&NOSCAN=N&IKT0=&TRM0=&ACT3=* &IKT3=8183&ACT=SRCHA&IKT=1016&SR T=YOP&ADI_BIB=&TRM=Wendunmuth%20&REC=* &TRM3=))). *Wendunmuth*, which translates as ‘Turn your Sorrow or Melancholy, consists of 2083 stories, which obviously greatly appealed to the public audience. The famous Frankfurt book dealer Michael Harder notes in his *Meßmemorial* from 1569, that he sold 118 copies of Kirchhof’s *Wendunmuth* during the book fair (Gotzkowsky 1993, 513; cf. also the contributions to Plotke and Seeber, ed., 2019). Research has mostly ignored Kirchhof’s work despite its enormous volume and significant influence on posterity (cf., however, Classen 2009, 64–146).

Kirchhof was inspired to turn his attention to the creation of jest narratives when a friend gave him as a gift a copy of Heinrich Bebel’s (1473–1518) *Bücher süßer Fazetien* (1506, in Latin) in 1555. Originally, he intended to translate the text into German, but soon enough his poetic creativity took over, so he began to write a flood of these short tales that are determined by humor, mockery, criticism, and satire, very much in the same vein as Pauli’s *Schimpf und Ernst* and Georg Wickram’s *Rollwagenbüchlein*. After the death of his first wife in 1576, he gained the position of the castellan of Spangenberg in the vicinity of Kassel (northern Hessen), where he married a second time. He appears to have died after 1602.

On his title page, Kirchhof explicitly explains that he worked with Bebel’s work as his basis for his own collection and set the tone by emphasizing the major topics in his book: “höflicher, züchtiger und lustiger historien, schimpffreden und gleichnüssen” (Kirchhof, vol. 1, 1869/1980; polite, well-mannered, and entertaining narratives, jest narratives, and parables). He also underscored that each story contains a moral teaching, which thus confirms the direct connection with Pauli’s work: “morale zuerclerung” (moral interpretation).

In his dedication to his Marburg friends, Otthe, Eckbrecht, and Herman, Kirchhof elaborates in specific terms his deep concern not to turn one’s attention to idle talk with which many people could get insulted, as would often happen in assemblies of drinking parties in taverns. He is particularly troubled by those people

who carelessly embarrassed women, maids, and children with their crude and obscene talks: “schambare wort” (3; shameful words). He refers to many other publications that would only incite the audience to commit lecherous and uninhibited deeds: “gleich wie mit feuer zuo dürrem holtz oder stro zuoschüren” (3; like setting fire to dry wood or straw). By contrast, he tries to reach out to “ehrenleuten und guoten freunden” (3; honorable people and good friends) and to enjoy their free time together. Otherwise, melancholy could set in and a grave disrespect of God’s teaching.

His intention is, as he specifies, to turn the public away from the evil habit of mocking God, to provide reading material in German by translating Bebel’s work, to inject new morality into the literary or public discourse or narrations, and to bring back to the attention what many other authors have already previously talked about (4). He admits that he intervened in the stories and edited them to some extent, with the specific purpose of adding some moral teaching (4–5). Kirchhof also resorts to the humility topos, claiming a possibly missing literary ability in writing his stories, and yet he also argues that those might serve as a “warnung und beyspiel” (5; warning and example).

Quite parallel to Pauli and Wickram, the author also emphasizes the double intention of providing entertainment (“ergetzung und frölichkeit,” 5) and moral instruction (“nutz und nottwendig einem der mit vielen geschefften, schweren, ja auch bisweilen unnützen gedanken, zorn und trauwrigkeit, beladen” (5; of profit and necessary for the one who is burdened with many businesses, difficult and at times useless thoughts, anger, and sadness). Kirchhof can be credited with highlighting the psychological effect of storytelling, to “erquickten und zuorecht bringen” (5; refresh and get your mind straightened out). Moreover, he assumes that his stories could serve as ready examples to explain difficult life situations, both in case of “schimpff und ernst” (5), which takes us directly back to Pauli. Finally, he apologizes for having possibly committed errors in rendering Bebel’s Latin into German (6).

Of course, we do not encounter a real frame narrative, as Boccaccio or Chaucer had developed. Marguerite’s narrative introduction is also of a different nature than the prologues offered by Kirchhof or Pauli. However, the former concludes his first volume with some final comments, comparing the ending of his storytelling with the ending of all life, leading to death. He refers to God, prays for his mercy, and expresses his hope that he would be allowed to be welcomed by Christ in the afterlife (592). So, there is a frame, after all, although not in the same intensity and detail as in the previous, more famous cases.

## 7. Conclusion

Entertaining and secular literature in the history of early modern literature was a

major success story, with the individual works (*Schimpf und Ernst*, *Dil Ulenspiegel*, *Rollwagenbüchlein*, etc.) reaching many different audiences throughout the centuries. Although authors such as Michael Lindener in his *Rastbuechlein* (1558) emphasized increasingly only the jocose aspect – “Darinn schoene kurtzweylige / laecherliche vnnd lustige Bossen und Fabeln / welche Historien gley sein” (Lindener 1991, 1; containing wonderful, entertaining, funny and delightful pranks and fictional narratives that are similar to historical accounts. This is formulated very similarly also in the introduction, 3) – the narrative art was identified as a crucial vehicle to overcome melancholy (4), and the proper intention of literary entertainment for virtuous people was to chase away boredom. Lindener’s approach was much more sexual and graphic, projecting drastic images of frivolous individuals, moral transgressors, and adulteresses, and yet, he also continued with the same tradition as established by Pauli and his predecessors, offering a florilegium of entertaining tales that contain also didactic instructions, warnings, and lessons about proper behavior. Lindener was not as explicit in that regard as others, tending to conclude with comments on the company of people laughing about a scandal or transgression. Nevertheless, the implied criticism and moral admonishments are also noticeable in the *Rastbüchlein*.

We could also refer to Martin Montanus’s *Wegkuerzer* (1557) or Jacob Frey’s *Gartengesellschaft* (1556) as additional examples of this new genre. Each time we discover noteworthy comments by the narrator that initiate the collections, but we do not observe any interest in providing an introductory tale as is the case in the English, French, and Italian examples. Instead, the emphasis rests on entertainment by means of lively tales about people’s foolishness, ignorance, or transgression. A number of times, epimythia provide final comments, or moral teachings. However, those are not specifically directed with the prologues, for instance, although the overarching concerns appear to be parallel, so we can identify, after all, a subtle and yet meaningful intradiegetic conversation.

Obviously, the formal differences to Boccaccio’s or Chaucer’s works are evident, but this does not mean that the genre of the German *Schwänke* (or jest narratives) ought to be divorced completely from that tradition, as recent scholarship has repeatedly done (Kleinschmidt and Japp, ed., 2018). The frame is there, after all, even if only in a truncated form. More importantly, however, the strategic intentions by these authors prove to be mostly the same as those by their English and Italian predecessors, as Pauli clearly indicated with his title, *Schimpf und Ernst*. This vast corpus of entertaining and didactic texts served exceedingly well to mirror human life and to reflect on the countless shortcomings that vexed early modern society to no end.

The vast volume of these entertaining and also didactic tales has probably



overwhelmed modern researchers, and since it seemed more relevant to focus on the body of literary texts determined by the religious debates of the sixteenth century, it is little wonder that this *Schwankliteratur* still awaits further investigation (Classen 2009; for an example of almost complete neglect, see Hoffmeister 2007, 603). When we place the works by Pauli, Wickram, Kirchhof, Montanus or Frey more closely next to their European sources or predecessors, we will gain a much better critical tool to comprehend the situation within early modern German literature. While the narrative framework is hardly developed by any of those writers, they certainly made serious efforts to reflect upon their own approaches in composing their entertaining and didactic texts.

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