

History of Early Modern Society and Everyday Life as Reflected in the Works of the Bestseller Author Johannes Pauli (1522)

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Abstract:

Historians would be well advised to take a closer look at the didactic and entertaining tales published by Johannes Pauli in 1522, a collection that quickly emerged as a true best- and longseller, being popular far into the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries. Although he was a Franciscan writing during the early years of the Protestant Reformation, Pauli did not support Luther and his companions. Nevertheless, in many respects, he pursued similar ideas, criticizing, ridiculing, and commenting on the shortcomings and foibles of his contemporaries. For historians, his narratives, almost 700 in total, prove to be highly valuable since they reflect on the infinite kaleidoscope of human life conditions, with all the problems people tend to face or reveal. This study is the first probe into Schimpf und Ernst as a source for many different scholars in the field of Early Modern Studies, addressing the various social classes, the genders, economic and religious conflicts, war, justice, crime, fools, entertainment, truth, virtues and vices. Here we encounter a most valuable literary mirror of social, intellectual, religious, gender, economic, and political conditions in the early sixteenth century. Although Pauli drew heavily from classical and medieval sources, his selection and adaptation transformed these many prose tales into specific comments about ordinary conditions in human life.

Keywords: Johannes Pauli, sermon narratives, entertaining literature, historical sources, early sixteenth century, anticlericalism, rape, truth, justice, fools, entertainers, peasants, aristocrats, peasants

INTRODUCTION

For historians or scholars in the field of social studies and anthropology, the truly critical question has always been whether they can identify enough sources to build a case about specific conditions, events, circumstances, and people in the past. It makes perfect sense, hence, to consult chronicles, letters, last wills, judgments, and a variety of other contemporary documents to find sufficient evidence. The more voices can be brought to the table, the more solid would then be the historian's argument. In order to understand more than just the surface events, such as wars, enthronements, legal decisions, economic arrangements, trade, banking, building, or diplomatic exchanges, it proves to be critically important to investigate also deeper levels of cultural-historical conditions.

For quite some decades, hence, three major new approaches have been developed that have proven to be highly effective in uncovering innovative levels of meaning of past cultures: the investigation of the history of mentality, the examination of everyday life, and, most recently, the history of emotions.¹ Latest research has also probed what we can recognize through the

¹ Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *what is the History of Emotions?* What is History series. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018; *Emotions and Medieval Textual Media*, ed. Mary C. Flannery. Early European Research, 13.

available documents as to racism, gender conflicts, nationalism, and ecocriticism (nature).² However, those new angles also require new sources to be considered for the analysis, even though innovative methodologies applied to well-known narratives can equally unearth significantly innovative aspects concerning people's ordinary lives.

One of the more productive and yet also problematic sources would certainly be the literary text, and this also for the historian. On the one hand, fictional works powerfully mirror forms of imagination and fantasy,³ hence a different dimension of reality; on the other, they reveal what many people enjoyed hearing or reading about. It would not matter, for instance, whether King Arthur actually existed or not,⁴ whereas it centrally matters for us that countless people already then admired him and reproduced either actively or passively that myth. In parallel, we have realized the extent to which particularly fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literature served quite poignantly as a mirror of the social, political, moral, religious, and economic conditions, whether we think of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (ca. 1377)⁵ or *Des Teufels Netz* (ca. 1414).⁶ Studying the various works by Christine de Pizan (1364-ca. 1430), for instance, sheds enormous light on late medieval gender relationships and encourages us strongly to recognize that women at that time could have been highly educated and were certainly prepared to make their voices heard in public. As much as patriarchy ruled, so to speak, it would be a misconception to assume that late medieval women were simply repressed and treated as muted chattel.

Already several decades ago, a team of French scholars under the guidance of Georges Duby launched a new research project dedicated to the private life in the various centuries.⁷ As literary

Turnhout: Brepols, 2018; *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe: 1100–1700*, ed. Andrew Lynch and Susan Broomhall. The Routledge Histories (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

² *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher. 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (orig. 1993). Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2008; *Alltag im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Harry Kühnel. 3rd ed. (orig. 1984). Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Verlag Styria, 1986; Otto Borst, *Alltagsleben im Mittelalter*. Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag, 1983. As to the connections between medieval people and us today, a notion which is, of course, subject to considerable generalizations, see Catherine Brown, "In the Middle," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.3 (2000): 548–74. For ecocritical perspectives, see now Albrecht Classen, *Water in Medieval Literature: An Ecocritical Reading*. Ecocritical Theory and Practice (Lanham, MD, Boulder, CO, et al.: Lexington Books, 2018).

³ See now the contributions to *Imagination and Fantasy in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Projections, Dreams, Monsters, and Illusions*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 24 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020).

⁴ Andrew Breeze, *The Historical Arthur and the Gawain Poet: Studies on Arthurian and Other Traditions*. Studies in Medieval Literature (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023).

⁵ *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶ Albrecht Classen, "Death, Sinfulness, the Devil, and the Clerical Author: The Late Medieval German Didactic Debate Poem *Des Teufels Netz* and the World of Craftsmanship," *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*, ed. A. Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 16 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 277–96.

⁷ *A History of Private Life*. Vol. II: *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby (orig. 1985), trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988); cf. also Arno Borst, *Lebensformen im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, and Vienna: Ullstein, 1973); Hans-Werner Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. from the German by Steven W. Rowan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993 (orig. 1986); Arnold Esch, *Die Lebenswelten des europäischen Spätmittelalters: Kleine Schicksale selbst erzählt in Schreiben an den Papst* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2014). Cf. also Peter Dinzelbacher, *Lebenswelten des Mittelalters 1000–1500*. Bachmanns Basiswissen, 1 (Badenweiler: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Bachmann, 2010); Hans-Werner Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. from the German by Steven W. Rowan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993 (orig. 1986); Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003; Flocel Sabaté,

scholars have widely confirmed, the large body of late medieval prose and verse narratives by literary giants such as Giovanni Boccaccio and Geoffrey Chaucer, or Heinrich Kaufringer and Marguerite Navarre contains a vast array of reflections on everyday life conditions and could be regarded as truly valuable sources, also for the historian. Here we encounter representatives of the various social classes, gender, and age groups (though not, races), and we learn about virtues and vices, happy and sad circumstances, economic and religious problems, and also about social interactions, conflicts, friendship, and love. As a side remark, the same could apply to medieval art and musical history which also mirrored important aspects of society.

Studying these stories (in prose and verse) invites us to explore the many different social frameworks and perspectives characteristic of that period. Their fictional character would not have a negative impact on the conclusions that we could draw; instead, we would simply have to recognize it as a projection of deeply-seated fears, aspirations, and fantasies that had their own impact on the material dimension and both mirrored and influenced everyday life conditions.⁸ We should also add that history, as we commonly perceive it, is the result of endless conversations, negotiations, arguments, and exchanges. Hence, the step from history as such in its material conditions, to literature, and vice versa, would be only a small one, with both fields of investigation cross-fertilizing each other.⁹ After all, when poets discussed the lives of their protagonists, they had to be somewhat realistic to make sense out of their narrative material. Thus, historical research and literary history meet and entwine each other.¹⁰

JOHANNES PAULI

The history of late medieval literature is filled with names of major and lesser authors and poets, titles of works, and genres. Some achieved great success, such as the Swiss Dominican Priest Ulrich Bonerius with his *The Gemstone* (ca. 1350) or Geoffrey Chaucer with his *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1400), others have remained fairly obscure, such as Franco Sacchetti (ca. 1335–ca. 1400) and Heinrich Kaufringer (ca. 1400). In the course of time, however, especially with the help of the printing press, new market opportunities emerged and made it possible that individual titles such as Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst* (1522) could soon grow into veritable bestsellers. Pauli's

Life and Religion in the Middle Ages. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015; Albrecht Classen, "Everyday Life and Culture in the Late Middle Ages: The Evidence of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*: Historical-Medical and Social-Cultural Aspects," *Mediaevistik* 30 (2018): 225–40. The list of comparable studies is legion.

⁸ Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur: Literatur u. Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. 2 vols. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986); he offers a wealth of research references; Aaron J. Gurjewitsch, *Mittelalterliche Volkskultur*, trans. from the Russian by Matthias Springer (orig. 1981; Munich: C. H. Beck, 1987); Christian Domenig, *Geschichte in Bewegung: das Mittelalter jenseits der Politik* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2022); Claudia Wittig, *Learning to be Noble in the Middle Ages: Moral Education in North-Western Europe*. *Disputatio*, 33 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022). The literature on this topic is legion.

⁹ W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative*. *Chaucer Studies*, 14 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1988); see the contributions to *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative: Context and Contestation*, ed. Morny Joy (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Hans-Werner Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. from the German by Steven W. Rowan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993 (orig. 1986); Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003; Flocel Sabaté, *Life and Religion in the Middle Ages*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015; Albrecht Classen, "Everyday Life and Culture in the Late Middle Ages: The Evidence of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*: Historical-Medical and Social-Cultural Aspects," *Mediaevistik* 30 (2018): 225–40; and see the contributions to *Making the Medieval Relevant: How Medieval Studies Contribute to Improving our Understanding of the Past*, ed. Chris Jones, Conor Kostick, and Klaus Oschema. *Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung*, Beihefte, 6. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020.

collection of tales was highly popular not only throughout the sixteenth century; it also continued to appeal to its audiences far into the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries).¹¹

Pauli was a Franciscan preacher and administrator who was a highly prolific collector of short tales, culling his material from a wide range of classical and medieval sources, and also from his own experiences. Those tales, almost 700 in total, address numerous topics of relevance in human life and were intended as narrative material for preachers. But *Schimpf und Ernst* soon turned into a large collection of entertaining and didactic stories that stand on their own. In the course of time, new editors modified this work, either by eliminating or by adding some tales depending on the targeted audience. Posterity happily drew from Pauli's work, adapting individual narratives for their own purposes, removing more traditional Catholic narratives and emphasizing more a Protestant perspective. Overall, later authors of *Schwank* literature, such as Hans Sachs (1494-1576) or Hans Wilhelm Kirchof (ca. 1525- ca. 1602) enthusiastically responded to Pauli and acknowledged his work as a bedrock for their own efforts. Altogether, since *Schimpf und Ernst* continued to exert a major appeal throughout times, we can certainly identify it as bestseller and also 'longseller'.¹²

Pauli made a particular effort to address major themes that concerned his world, or human society at large, and thus he succeeded in a surprisingly refreshing manner, as the book title itself indicates, to entertain and to provide entertainment with his stories. Of course, as a writer or preacher he promulgated his own ideals and values determined by his Franciscan worldview, but he utilized many different ordinary situations within his society to illuminate what people tended to do and how they reacted to conflicts, challenges, and problems. Thus, at least indirectly, we can recognize here a unique opportunity to identify basic situations and conditions that are relevant for our understanding of the history of mentality or the history of emotions, both during the early sixteenth century and, *mutatis mutandis*, in later times when Pauli's stories continued to be popular. Scholars have so far focused on a variety of literary motifs addressed here, but we have not yet explored to what extent we could use his tales as 'historical' or sociological sources.¹³

¹¹ For an excellent edition, not ever superseded, see Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ed. Johannes Bolte. 2 vols. Alte Erzähler, 2 (Berlin: Herbert Stubenrauch, 1924; reprinted Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972). The second volume contains a list of Pauli's successors and imitators, a list of texts that were added to later editions, a bibliography of the large number of imprints until the nineteenth century, commentaries on the individual tales, especially references to other narratives containing the same motif (not sufficient at all), annotations, and a glossary. To avoid technical errors, I spell out all superscripta that serve in lieu of *umlauts*, such as 'ö' (as oe), 'ä' (as ae), or 'ü' (as ue).

¹² Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Martin Montanus, Hans Wilhelm Kirchof und Michael Lindener*. Koblenz-Landauer Studien zu Geistes-, Kultur- und Bildungswissenschaften, 4 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009).

¹³ Anna Mühlherr, Johannes Pauli, "Deutsche Dichter der frühen Neuzeit (1450–1600): Ihr Leben und Werk", ed. Stephan Füssel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1993), 125–37; Arlene E. Pearsall, *Johannes Pauli (1450–1520): On the Church and Clergy*. Medieval and Renaissance Series, 11 (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter et al.: Edwin Mellen, 1994); Hans-Jörg Uther, "Pauli, Johannes," *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, ed. Rolf Wilhelm Brednich. Vol. 10.1 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 661–70; Seraina Plotke, "Erzählte Wertordnungen: Recht und Gerechtigkeit in Johannes Paulis 'Schimpf und Ernst' (1522)," *Rechtsnovellen: Rhetorik, narrative Strukturen und kulturelle Semantiken des Rechts in Kurzerzählungen des späten Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Pia Claudia Doering and Caroline Emmelius. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 263 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2017), 293–305; Sebastian Coxon, "'Da lacht der babst': zur komischen Erzählmotivik als Mittel der Kohärenzstiftung in Johannes Paulis 'Schimpf und Ernst' (1522)," *Schwanksammlungen im frühneuzeitlichen Medienumbruch: Transformationen eines sequentiellen Erzählparadigmas*, ed. Seraina Plotke and Stefan Seeber. Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift, Beiheft 96 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019), 223–41; Caroline Emmelius, "Fallkontexte: Narrativität,

With Pauli, we encounter a writer who was apparently deeply familiar with many aspects of human life, although, or just because he was a Franciscan preacher.

Pauli, to be sure, did not write as a chronicler; he was not interested in historical aspects, as much as those appear throughout his work on a regular basis. Instead, he elaborated many different themes and explored them by means of embedding them into historical contexts. Moreover, Pauli drew from a vast number of classical and medieval themes and motifs and adapted those for his own purposes. At first sight, that might make his tales actually useless for historical investigations. However, at a closer look, we recognize that he commonly examined everyday-life situations which his readers could easily identify with, and this irrespective of the sources he employed. Those are normally combined with references to common situations or relationships typical of that time, as we may assume.

The very first narrative, for instance, examines a conflict between a nobleman and his servants who use his repeated absences to eat and drink whatever they can find, although they would normally not be allowed to do so. A fool among them, however, reveals all their doing to his lord, who tends to inquire with the fool upon his return what the other servants might have done during his absence. Unfortunately for the fool, the servants realize that he is tattling on them, so they brutally whip him one day to teach him a lesson not to betray them to their lord. Subsequently, once the lord has returned from his trip and wants to learn once again what has taken place behind his back while he had been away, the fool no longer talks to him about that and only refers to the scars on his back that tell him never to reveal the truth.

The essential topic here pertains to the question of what constitutes truth, who is willing to tell truth, and what happens when violence enters the picture. At the same time, as we can easily recognize, the poet refers to a common problem in noble households where many servants and maids are hired who happily misuse their lord's property, which he knows about but is unable to prevent from happening. All that he can do is to mock his employees ("Spotzweiß," 7). He knows about their secret doing through his fool, an official entertainer, who appears to be a very simple person who does not fully understand what is going on and why the servants beat him so brutally. However, he innocently reveals the real problem in this world because he identifies 'truth' as the worst thing here on earth. Anyone who would reveal the truth would hence face violent treatment.

The entire first section (tales nos. 1–9) reflects upon the challenges for the truth because people no longer want to hear the truth and prefer illusions and fantasy. As the second narrative indicates – it appears to be more a commentary on the first story – the fool was closer to the truth than all the preachers Pauli knows of. He acrimoniously accuses them all of hiding the truth without having ever received a beating like the fool did in his innocence and simplicity. The preachers try, as the poet emphasizes, to avoid irritating anyone, especially not their superiors ("besunder die Obern," 8). Without being an early 'Protestant,' Pauli certainly added his contribution to a growing anticlericalism, reminding his audience of the bravery and courage demonstrated by

Diskursivität und Kontextualität von Mordfällen in Erzählsammlungen des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Schwanksammlungen im frühneuzeitlichen Medienumbruch: Transformationen eines sequentiellen Erzählparadigmas*, ed. Seraina Plotke and Stefan Seeber. Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift, Beiheft 96 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019), 189–222. For a recent biographical and interpretive overview in English, see Albrecht Classen, "Johannes Pauli," *Literary Encyclopedia* (forthcoming).

John the Baptist and later Bishop Ambrosius who spoke out for the truth irrespective of any possible persecutions by King Herold and Emperor Theodosius respectively.¹⁴

In the third tale, we hear once again of a marginal figure, this time not a fool, but a vagrant and entertainer, "ein Gauckoelman" (8), who cannot find any housing one evening because he has the habit of telling only the truth, which then regularly angers all people. Although a farmer then finds this to be a highly valuable virtue, as soon as the homeless man has told him the truth about the way how he and his wife, along with the cat, all look like, that is, somewhat disfigured in the face because of problems with the eyes, he drives him out of the house. However, in this context, the narrator offers a somewhat different reading, suggesting that people should be careful with telling the truth because it would hurt too many people's sensitivities. Often, it would be better to keep quiet and not to blurt out what one would think about the others. As Pauli then confirms in other tales, such as no. 5, people do not like to hear the truth – it does not find housing (10) – which hence implies that the entire world is determined by falsehood insofar as people serve the "Herren der Falscheit" (10; the lord of untruth).

In social terms, the author does not demonstrate any hesitation to confirm this deeply-troubling insight by telling stories about farmers (no. 5) and noblemen (no. 6), the Roman senate (no. 7), and a farmer's wife (no. 9). As a Franciscan preacher, Pauli was not opposed to addressing universal concerns and people's shortcomings wherever he observed them, so we face here the remarkable situation of an author who aimed for addressing all people among his audience, highlighting a specific sin or weakness as it manifested itself at all social classes.

The second section of tales addresses young women, maids, nuns, but also evil characters. In the tenth story, we are taken to the world of a university where a young man wastes all of his money on women and parties until he is completely impoverished and has to leave. His prostitute cries about that but not because she would miss him; instead, she only regrets that she could not get her hands on his expensive coat with buttons out of silver. The narrator then generalizes this observation and notes that people generally only think of money, and whores pursue their business for no other reason but money (13).

The following story (no. 11), however, presents a highly virtuous young nun whom a nobleman wants to have as his mistress. He is even threatening to burn down the entire monastery with the nuns if the abbess does not turn over that beautiful nun. When the latter inquires with the messengers why the lord is so interested in her, she is told that her eyes are so attractive to him. In order to comply with his request, she has another nun gouge out her eyes and sent those to her admirer. When he finds her eyes in a box that the messenger's hand over to him, he is so deeply ashamed and suddenly filled with God's grace that he changes his entire life. Pauli, however, uses this story to comment on the general decline in morality and virtues among nuns since in present

¹⁴ See the seminal volume, *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman. *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, 51 (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill, 1993); for literary-historical perspectives, see Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte: Geistliche in den Mären des deutschen Mittelalters*. Braunschweiger Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 2 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1999); Albrecht Classen, "Anticlericalism and Criticism of Clerics in Medieval and Early-Modern German Literature," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 72 (2014): 283–306; Cordelia Hess, "A Common Enemy: Late Medieval Anticlericalism Revisited," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 21.1 (2013): 1–20; online at: DOI:10.1515/zfr-2013-0003.

times those cloistered women would not live up to the level of that fictional character, who regained her eyesight through a divine intervention (14).

In the thirteenth tale, a nobleman is wooing a farmer's daughter and wants to bring her to his castle, probably only as his prostitute. When he arrives at the farm, no one seems to be present, but at the end, when he is about to leave, she calls out to him from her hiding place, a barrel, which reveals that she had only pretended to be a virtuous woman and was more than willing to become his mistress. We hear only a few times throughout the Middle Ages and early modern age of a similar situation when a peasant woman becomes a lord's wife, such as in Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich* (ca. 1190), in Boccaccio's tenth story told on the tenth day in his *Decameron* (ca. 1350) – the famous Griselda – and in the anonymous tale *Dis ist von dem Heselín*.¹⁵ Granted, there is no indication that in Pauli's text the young woman might marry the nobleman, but we are told for sure that she becomes his mistress. In other words, despite the focus on the woman's pretend chastity, which the narrator ridicules, the entire story serves us well to confirm that personal relationships between members of the aristocracy and the rural population certainly existed, even if only in sexual terms.

In a number of tales, the poet discusses various conditions under which young women from the class of burghers get married (nos. 14, 15), or sexual conflicts, such as the charge of rape raised by a maid against her wooer (no. 16). Whereas there, her claim fails because the judge learns that she would have known well how to defend herself under any circumstance, in no. 17, two village women pursue the son of a rich farmer and become pregnant at the same time. They thus try to force him to marry her, but the village judges decide that they had imposed themselves upon him, like whores, which frees the man from any constraint to marry either one of them.

In the fourth section that deals with fools and foolishness, a peasant requests help from a nobleman because he has a garden in which a hare causes him much damage. As a peasant, he was not allowed to carry weapons, so it seems. The nobleman arrives with a number of dogs, tries to catch and kill the hare, but he fails because the little animal gets away. The entire effort, however, causes more damage to the garden than the hare could have done in ten years (22–23). For Pauli, this ordinary situation in a village served as a metaphor of all those people who suffer from envy and are never willing to let it go, although it would be God's obligation to exact justice. The more those people try to avenge themselves, the more they hurt themselves. The narrator includes a common proverb regarding the one who digs a hole for another person to fall into but at the end falls into it himself (23). We can ignore the religious didacticism here and focus on the fact that the preacher refers to an ordinary situation with this farmer who cannot even hunt down a hare in his garden. Pauli hence evokes the option that a nobleman is socially tasked with handling wild animals and to control the damage that they can easily bring about.

Several times we hear of convicts who are about to be executed at the gallows and act foolishly (nos. 27 and 28). In story 29, a fox is sent to his death because it has devoured many geese and

¹⁵ Albrecht Classen, "Utopian Space in the Countryside: Love and Marriage Between a Knight and a Peasant Girl in Medieval German Literature. Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich*, Anonymous, 'Dis ist von dem Heselín,' Walther von der Vogelweide, Oswald von Wolkenstein, and Late-Medieval Popular Poetry," *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: The Spatial Turn in Premodern Studies*, ed. Albrecht Classen, with the collaboration of Christopher R. Clason. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 9 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 251–79.

chicken, a practice which would seem absurd to us if historical sources did not confirm that this was actually quite often the case, charging animals in legal terms for damage they had caused.¹⁶

Even when Pauli draws on a very old story, commonly shared throughout the Middle Ages, to convey a didactic message, we discover opportunities to recognize reflections on ordinary life situations. In story no. 32, for instance, the Romans try to convince the Greeks to provide them with laws and regulations to build their nation. The Greeks, however, first want to test the Romans and send a wise man to dispute with one of them but only with the premise that they resort only to making signs to each other. The Romans, helpless in this situation, choose a fool and dress him up elegantly, assuming that if he would be defeated by the Greek, the latter would have defeated only a fool, no one else; if the fool, however, would win, then the Romans could win over all other peoples (26).

In their dispute, the Greek raises one finger to indicate that there is only one God. The Roman raises two fingers in the assumption that the other man threatened him to poke out one of his eyes. He himself would then poke out both of his opponent's eyes. The Roman also lifts automatically his thumb, which the Greek reads as a sign that there is the Holy Trinity in one God. Next, he lifts his open palm to signal that for God everything would be known. The Roman is afraid that this might mean that the Greek would want to strike his face, so he lifts his fist to threaten the other one with violence. For the wise man from Athens, this can only mean that God has all things hidden in his power and refuses to let people understand any of the divine secrets (27).

Consequently, with the dispute completed, the Greek acknowledges the Roman's wisdom and regards him and his people as worthy enough to receive laws, here meaning, the Bible. The narrator, however, then comments that if the fool had spoken just one word, he would have easily revealed his utter ignorance.¹⁷ While the entire set-up specifically targets the problem of everyday miscommunications, the critical point for us would be that Pauli at the end explicitly criticizes the members of urban city councils (27) for resorting to a similar strategy to deceive the citizens about their actual lack of effectiveness. The essential point, however, prove to be the intricacies of human language that commonly misleads people and defies all efforts to communicate effectively. Whereas the Greek scholar believed firmly in the value of hand gestures, presumably being unmistakable in their meaning, the Roman fool resorted to his primitive understanding of those signals and gave them a very different meaning. Unfortunately, as the author thus indicates, even the holiest and most precious documents – the Bible or laws – would easily get into the hands of unworthy people. The hilarious scene with the two men disputing with each other thus speaks volumes about the difficulties with language itself, a confusing, often ambivalent and obscure medium for communication.

The following tale (no. 33) picks up a similar theme, though here it is a young man who reveals his foolishness when people come up to him after the burial of his father and lament for and with him. His response, however, is always the same, telling them that he wishes them that their father

¹⁶ Peter Dinzelbacher, *Das fremde Mittelalter: Gottesurteil und Tierprozess*. 2nd, extensively rev. ed. (2006; Darmstadt: wbg Academic, 2020).

¹⁷ This account exists, for example, also in Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor* (ca. 1330/1340). For an online version of the relevant passage, see <https://markgredler.com/the-debate-between-a-greek-scholar-and-a-roman-ruffian/> (last accessed on July 9, 2023). For a comparative study, see Laurence De Looze "To Understand Perfectly Is to Misunderstand Completely: 'The Debate in Signs' in France, Iceland, Italy and Spain," *Comparative Literature* 50.2 (Spring, 1998): 136–154. Pauli's case has never been discussed, as far as I can tell.

would also die, and then he would come to their funeral and express his empathy with them (27). The narrator at first provides a brief but important insight about common funeral practices in “etlichen Steten oder Doerffern” (27; many cities and villages). In other words, he is discussing the ritual of expressing one’s condolences, as we still tend to do today, of course.

The actual concern here is, however, that people easily reveal their ignorance and stupidity when they open their mouths and utter words. Altogether, the topic addressed here also pertains to communication and its failures in many situations. Pauli, however, is not the only one to address this concern, as we can discover it in countless other medieval and early modern narratives (heroic epics, courtly romances, *fabliaux*, or courtly love poetry).¹⁸ Communication itself has always been of greatest importance in public and private life, so these literary examples serve exceedingly well for the historical analysis of fundamental conflicts and concerns also during the early sixteenth century.¹⁹

The section about fools or jesters, either mentally challenged individuals or entertainers, consists of a larger number of tales, but one, in particular, deserves to be mentioned here, no. 30, where a fool observes an army moving into the war. Inquiring about what they might be doing in the war, he learns that they would destroy villages and conquer cities, burn grain and soil wine; and worst of all, that they would slay each other. Puzzled about this insane operation, he wonders why they would do all that and learns to his great surprise, “Das man friden mach” (31; to make peace). The fool opines that all that would seem rather crazy to him, and he suggests that it would be better to make peace first before the outbreak of war. He regards himself as smarter than all of them because if he had any saying or influence, he would establish peace before all the damage would have occurred: “nit darnach, so der Schaden geschehen ist” (31; not after once the harm has been done).

Pauli was not at all the first or the last one to speak up against war, but it seems that scholarship has not yet recognized the value of this story for the overall discourse during the early modern age.²⁰ He might not have intended to formulate a specific anti-war concept, especially because

¹⁸ Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung. Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002); id., “Communication in the Middle Ages,” *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms – Methods – Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), vol. 1, 330–43; see also the contributions to *Communication, Translation, and Community in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period: New Cultural-Historical and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 26 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2022).

¹⁹ Charles W. Connell, *Popular Opinion in the Middle Ages: Channeling Public Ideas and Attitudes*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 18 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016). As to theme of communication in Pauli’s narratives, see Christiane Witthöft, “An den Grenzen symbolischer Kommunikation: Verstehen und Missverstehen als Thema von gestischen Disputationen,” *Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung im Mittelalter: 11. Symposium des Mediävistenverbandes vom 14. bis 17. März 2005 in Frankfurt an der Oder*, ed. Ulrich Knefelkamp and Kristian Bosselmann-Cyran. Symposium des Mediävistenverbandes, 12 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2007), 295–308.

²⁰ Ben Lowe, *Imagining Peace: A History of Early English Pacifist Ideas, 1340–1560*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). See also the contributions to *War and Peace: Critical Issues in European Societies and Literature, 800–1800*, ed. A. Classen and Nadia Margolis. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 8 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011); and to *Gewalt, Krieg und Geschlecht im Mittelalter*, ed. Amalie Föbel (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020); Albrecht Classen, “Poetische Proteste gegen den Krieg: Der Meistersänger Hans Sachs als früher Kriegsgegner im 16. Jahrhundert,” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 63 (2007): 235–56; id., “The Horrors of War in the History of German Literature: From Heinrich Wittenwiler and Hans Jacob

there is no follow-up, that is, he does not address the topic any further within that section dedicated to fools or jesters. However, this short narrative contributes meaningfully to the overall discourse against the insanity of war, and this in the early sixteenth century.

In another case (no. 44), a nobleman purchases an entire county and travels from village to village to establish his authority. Everyone, submissively, tries to demonstrate their loyalty by means of gifts, which the lord has his scribe's record. They all are pleased with it in the assumption that he wants to remember their generosity for the future. However, the opposite is the case because this prince takes all those gifts as a standard for future payments, or rents, which imposes heavy new 'taxes' on the people. The narrator's criticism of this nobleman's abuse of his privileged position finds vivid terms, which could have had wider implications beyond this text. But in the second part, this lord gets ill with gout and loses the ability to walk. While he is resting in his bed, his jester playfully sets fire to his bed and refuses to extinguish it because he has learned from the people that once a person would have done a favor to the lord, that would become a standard expectation: "wer dir einmal het geben, der muß es alwegen geben" (34; whoever has given you something sometime, must always give it to you).

For the author, who drew here from the Book of Wisdom (Old Testament) and from Seneca, the message implies that the one who commits a sin is to suffer for it through the same condition (34). We can also gain more insight into an additional point raised by this story since it directly challenges and criticizes lords who impose too high taxes on their subjects and threaten them in their existence. This topic reappears later in the section dealing

In story no. 46, a lord has a jester whom he likes very much. The latter falls very ill one day, and his master gives him solace, assuring him that he would travel to God together with him. But the fool rejects this premise, insisting that he would like to travel to hell with him since he had always been his companion throughout his life. The lord is rather surprised about this blasphemy, but the fool then points out that all the nobleman's subjects call him an evil man for many different wrongdoings. As such, he would certainly go to hell, and the fool thus wants to accompany him there. His master is deeply troubled by this message, changes his way of life, and turns into a pious and devout man (35).

Again, behind the religious teaching about hypocritical preachers and other liars, which the narrator formulates in his epimythium, the major portion of the tale is determined by specific criticism of the lord because of all kinds of abuse of his dominant position. Pauli did not hold back in commenting on corruption and evil rulers and thus warned the members of the nobility to guard their own virtues and observe their obligations as rulers.

Within the section dealing with fools, Pauli turns his attention to many different social settings, such as the university (no. 50), the Holy See (no. 51; cf. also no. 95), the castle of a nobleman (no. 52), a peasant's farm (no. 53), and a public house in the city where people sing and dance (no. 54). Each time, of course, the poet turns it all around and reflects on the religious message contained in each one of them. Nevertheless, this all confirms that here we encounter a most valuable collection of narratives about a kaleidoscope of social and political settings as they existed in the

Christoffel von Grimmelshausen to Rainer Maria Remarque. Literary Outcries against Inhumanity from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Centuries," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9.2 (2022): 121–44; <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.9-2-2>.

early sixteenth century. Pauli did not compose his tales for just one type of audience; instead, as a preacher, he obviously intended to reach a most mixed group of listeners, perhaps in public at a market outside of a church. We also notice that he did not pursue harsh and bitter perspectives, and never radically condemns individuals, as much as he ridicules and mocks them for their shortcomings. His stories are, as scholarship has long observed, determined by a sense of humility and modesty since he hoped deeply to reform his listeners through humor and entertainment.²¹

In the fifth section, dedicated to members of monastic orders, a nobleman dislikes an abbot and tries to hurt him by presenting him with three, virtually impossible questions. First, what value he would assign him, where the center of the earth would be, and what the distance would be between good fortune and misfortune. Deeply troubled about those challenges, the abbot walks around in nature and encounters a swineherd who immediately offers his help and offers the best possible answers for the nobleman. He suggests that the latter would be worth 28 ducats because Christ was betrayed for 30, whereas the emperor would be worth 29. The center of the universe would be the monastery; he urges the nobleman to measure this himself. And as to the relationship between fortune and misfortune, he only refers to himself since from one day to the next he has gained the rank of abbot. Only then is the truth about his identity revealed, and the swineherd can hold on to the position of abbot. At the same time, the previous abbot is also treated with respect.

Pauli drew from a well-known motif, as elaborated, for instance, in the famous collection by Herman Bote (?), *Till Eulenspiegel* (first printed in 1510). What matters for us, however, pertains to the fact that the preacher introduces a swineherd and gives him so much credit that he can properly answer those three difficult questions and then is given the privilege of serving as the new abbot. Curiously, the narrator then does not offer any commentary (epimythium), and we are left with a story in which three social dimensions or classes interact with each other. It would seem highly unlikely that a swineherd would actually experience in reality such a meteorical rise to the rank of abbot, but Pauli at least imagined that because intelligence and wit can be found also among the members of the lowest classes. Moreover, the entire tale is predicated on the nobleman's strong antipathy for the abbot whom he would like to victimize and remove from his office.

Otherwise, we often hear about various exchanges and relationships between a cardinal and a monk (no. 56), a knight and his priestly confessor (nos. 57 and 58), a nobleman and an abbot (no. 59), and so forth. Consistently, Pauli raises his voice against moral, social, and economic shortcomings in monasteries and condemns monks or abbots for their wrongdoing. Most prominently, he highlights the problem of corruption which he observes also among the most dignified members who buy their posts with a good bribe (no. 62).

Other clerics who become the target of Pauli's satire are nuns (section VI) and priests (section VII), but then he also addresses people's fear of the devil (section VIII). Even here we observe the great opportunity to identify concrete everyday life conditions, such as in tale no. 81 where a civil clerk walks to a village to collect outstanding debts. The devil joins him on his way, and twice they hear people yelling about something that irritates them, wishing that the devil might take the screaming child or a disobedient swine. While the clerk believes that the devil would hence be

²¹ For a good, compact overview, see Alexander Hildebrand, "Johannes Pauli," *Hauptwerke der deutschen Literatur: Darstellungen und Interpretationen*, ed. Manfred Kluge and Rudolf Radler (Munich: Kindler, 1967), 67–68.

entitled to take each one, he is taught that the opposite is the case. When they arrive at the peasant's farm where the clerk is to ask for the debt, the peasant yells, "das dich der Tueffel holen muoß!" (57; may the devil fetch you). This, however, is meant seriously, and thus the devil is allowed to take the clerk with him into hell.

The narrator does not criticize the economic model and accepts that such clerks have to do their job, but he advises them to bless themselves when they arrive at a debtor's house for self-protection because their work itself would be evil and sinful. Most importantly here, the author explicitly engages with monetary loans and the difficulties for many poor people in paying those back, or paying their taxes. He does not express any surprise that the debtors turn to cussing in harsh terms because they just do not have the funds available to meet the demands. The only warning is that the collectors ought to bless themselves to guard from those aggressive curses (57). However, Pauli does not even consider the possibility that such loans could be forgiven; the financial constraints are there to stay. Indirectly, hence, this story provides us with a good mirror of financial dealings on the lower end of society.

In tale no. 80, however, the narrator becomes much more explicit in his condemnation of evil machinations among those who administer shires for their lords and collect the various types of taxes. One of those clerks and his wife feel strongly that they act in an evil fashion and abandon this task, but soon enough, they miss their previous wealth and take on the same professional responsibilities once again so that they can enjoy good food and a pleasant life.

One day, however, the husband encounters the devil who greets him identifying as a citizen of his own hellish kingdom. This scares him so much that he abandons this job for good. Pauli finally comments that those tax collectors would have to be viewed as wild animals that run through a storage room and kick down all the vessels. They are then followed by smaller animals that also rob and do not leave behind anything but bones. The final analogy then brings everything down to the critical point. The great lords take most of their subjects' properties by means of taxes and with violent means. Those are then followed by the officials who take the remains by means of additional taxes and demanding of gifts, leaving barely the poor people's skin on their legs (62). Finally, as the narrator concludes, those officials who collect the most for their lords are the best liked ones. But, as we are then told, "Das mag kum on Suend sein" (62; That can hardly happen without committing a sin).

It remains uncertain what economic concept Pauli might have had in mind, and how he would envision the proper relationship between the ordinary people and their lords. But there no doubt that he harshly criticizes the entire taxation system and regards the lords and their officials as greedy and sinful animals who commit, through their working, sinful deeds. Of course, he as a preacher viewed material wealth through a religious lens and formulated specific criticism of people's greed, such in the tale no. 178 where a man saves all of his money in a secret compartment in his chapel. He begs God all the time not to let him die until he would have filled that container, which then also happened. After his wife had remarried, the new husband prayed to God not to let him die until he would have consumed all that money, and this then also occurred. Pauli's criticism, however, is directed at those people who always desire what they do not have, while they do not use what they own. He comments: "Es froewt sie nichtz, dan das es da in dem Trog und in dem Schranck ligt" (117; Nothing makes them happy except that what is stored in a vessel or in a cupboard).

The narrator compares those people with a dog resting on a pile of hay who does not eat it and also does not allow the oxen and the other animals consume it. Quoting Petrarch (1304-1375), he concludes that many people simply store their money without doing anything, except that it encumbers their mind and fills it with worries. Most people would invest their money in a sinful and evil fashion, "aber wenig sein, die das Geld nuetzlich und wol bruchen" (177; but there are only few who use money in a reasonable and laudable fashion).

Pauli calls those people 'greedy' and ridicules them, as in the following story (no. 179) since they would only bear much work to acquire their money by way of hurting other people through taxations and fees. If they lose one penny, they would feel more sorrow about that than they feel joy about 40 ducats kept in a saving box. Similarly, in a tale dealing with usury (no. 201), the narrator points to an old usurer who is about to die and refuses to repent while already on his deathbed. Although his friends urge him intensively to change his heart and mind, he remains adamant and tells them that he would be able to follow their advice only if they would give him a different heart (127).

Turning this topic into a religious one, Pauli next observes that people are caught by the devil by means of worldly goods and greed. People would prove to be even more foolish than fish because the latter cannot see the fishing hook or the line catching it. And once it would be hooked, it desires nothing more but to get free again. People, on the other hand, that is, Christians particularly, know only too well how worrisome it is to acquire illegitimately some goods, or they should know it if they attended mass. They could go to confession and cleanse themselves, but they would not do that either. People would rather hand out some alms than to change their mind and heart (127).

In tale no. 203, a usurer works with a friend shortly before his death so that he would help him to return all the money that he had earned through his financial dealings. This decision is recorded in his last will. Later, the two sons come to that friend and try to bribe him with much money to revoke their father's last will because they want to keep the inherited wealth. The friend refuses to cooperate with them because it would mean the eternal condemnation of all of their souls. As a consequence, one of the sons slays their father's friend (128). The narrator can only comment that the sons would have badly hurt their father's salvation if he had inherited his wealth to them. People would be foolish if they entrusted the well-being of their souls to their surviving family members (128).

The list of other topics addressed by Paul is long and would not need to be discussed at greater length. For instance, he examines the problems of drunkenness (section XXI), gluttony (section XXII), wrath (section XXIII), sloth (section XXIV), death (sections XXV and XXVI), the soul (XXVII), confession and repentance (section XXVIII), etc. Other sections deal with the temptation of those objects that are banned for us (section XXXII), giving of alms (section XXXIII), prayer (section XXXIV), loyal servants (section XXXIX), inn-keepers (section XLII), gamblers (XLIII), sycophants (section XLIV), dancing and playing music (section XLV), organizing good festivals and celebrations (section XLVI), lying (section XLVII), and secrets (section XLVIII). The topic of peace and unity (section XLIX) is directly followed by the topics of prostitutes (section L) and painters (section LI), which altogether does not make much sense, except that the author simply combined whatever narrative material he could cull from different sources, both written and oral.

CONCLUSION

On the one hand, we might respond to these findings with some disappointment since Pauli obviously cared fairly little about a systematic arrangement of his tales. Even though there are thematic groupings, there is hardly ever a logical continuation from one section to the other. However, his audiences throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries disregarded those issues and responded rather with enthusiasm because *Schimpf und Ernst* offered both entertainment and instruction for virtually everyone, addressing the widest range of topics in human life. Virtues and vices, money issues and prostitution, entertainment and taxation, warfare and festivities, religious concerns and ignorance, communication and political structures find their narrative forums. The title of this volume was well phrased since it combined entertainment and instruction.

From a literary-historical perspective, we can identify this monumental work as a fascinating storehouse of narratives borrowed from classical, medieval, and also early modern sources. From a social-historical angle, Pauli presented most valuable material reflecting a wide range of issues in human life, commenting on taxes, usury, adultery, prostitution, loyalty, wisdom, communication, marriage, foolishness, and fear of the devil. We recognize here a fascinating and valuable gateway into early modern mentality, everyday-life conditions, and the world of emotions as reflected in this vast body of short prose narratives.

Of course, the author ultimately intended to convey religious and moral lessons, especially through the final comments, but many of the tales mirror ordinary situations and illuminate daily conflicts and misunderstandings, character weaknesses and vices.²² Here we come across valuable contemporary comments about abuse of the taxation system, usury, robbery, violence, gender conflicts, communication issues, and conflicts between the social classes. In this sense, *Schimpf und Ernst* proves to be an important narrative source not only for literary scholars, but also for historians, sociologists, and anthropo

²² Literary historians have certainly acknowledged Pauli's great contributions to the genre of *Schwankbücher* (jest narratives), but we can go beyond that perspective and recognize his tales also as valuable sources of social, mental, emotional, ethical, moral, and economic history of the early sixteenth century. See, for instance, Hans Rupprich, *Die deutsche Literatur vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Barock*. 2nd part: *Das Zeitalter der Reformation*. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 4.2 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1972), 167–68; Max Wehrli, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 1 (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1980), 1129–31. Recent research has not progressed much at all and continues to highlight moral and ethical issues. Those are certainly omnipresent, but they do not fully determine the true value of Pauli's narratives. See, for instance, Johannes Traulsen, "Virginität und Lebensform," *Legendarisches Erzählen: Optionen und Modelle in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. Julia Weitbrecht, Maximilian Benz, et al. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 273 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019), 137–58; Silvan Wagner, "Keimzellen für moralischen Sinn: prägnantes Erzählen in Johannes Paulis 'Schimpf und Ernst'," *Beiträge zur mediävistischen Erzählforschung*, 1, Sonderheft *Brevitas* (Oldenburg: BIS-Verlag der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, 2019), 497–526. For a full appreciation of the literary quality of *Schimpf und Ernst* we have also to comprehend the poet's strong interest in the vast array of concerns in human life at his time.