

Common Medicine for the Common Man: Picturing the “Striped Layman” in Early Vernacular Print

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The disruptive figure of the “striped layman” appeared in printed texts and images around the year 1500 in the southern German lands. This essay shows how it came to represent a new kind of reader of vernacular medical publications. Exploring the illustrated books of the Strasbourg surgeon-apothecary Hieronymus Brunschwig, their local context of humanist discourse, and the visual practice of their publisher, Johann Grüninger, I argue that their oft-neglected woodcuts of people in striped clothes constitute powerful visual commentary of Brunschwig’s (and others’) mission to impart medical agency and expertise to the “common man” at the eve of the Reformation.

INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN 1497 AND 1512, a remarkable series of vernacular medical books emerged from the printing house of Johann Grüninger (ca. 1455–ca. 1533) in Strasbourg, a free imperial city in the southwest corner of the Holy Roman Empire. Their unusual author, Hieronymus Brunschwig (ca. 1450–ca. 1530), a local surgeon and apothecary, was no learned scholar and his Latin was poor. Despite his evident command of a range of medical and alchemical texts, his expertise was largely based on the “daily handiwork” of a craftsman, trained in the local guild of barbers and bath masters.¹ Nonetheless, he was at the cutting edge of medical publication—his books on surgery and distillation were the first treatments of their respective subjects ever to be printed. Written in German (that is to say, the author’s native Alsatian dialect) and amply illustrated, they mark the beginning of a wave of publications addressed to the so-called common man—a vernacular readership of literate, but not learned,

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¹ Brunschwig, 1500a, sig. A2^r: “teglich hantwürckung.” All translations my own. On Brunschwig, see Bachofner; Eis. For more recent treatments in the history of science and medicine, see Rankin, 2014; Taape.

laypeople, often criticized by intellectual elites. The images include detailed renditions of healing plants and apparatus, and also lively scenes showing people engaged in different sorts of medical practices. The analysis of these latter images forms the core of this essay. While they are easily dismissed as mere decoration, I argue that they should be read as deliberate visual statements telling a powerful story about the intended audience of Brunschwig's works and about the politics of disseminating medical knowledge in vernacular print at the turn of the sixteenth century.

That story revolves around a recurring motif in the illustrations of Brunschwig's works: the figure of a man dressed in tight-fitting striped garments, who can always be seen at the center of the action (fig. 1). While Brunschwig's text does not comment on these striped men, a clue to their identity can be found in a later Grüninger publication, of 1518, the *Spiegel der artzney* (Mirror of medicine) by Lorenz Fries (ca. 1490–1550), a physician from Colmar (about a day's ride from Strasbourg). Like Brunschwig's books, it was written in the vernacular, and, intriguingly enough, referred to its prospective readers as "striped laymen."² The correspondence with the striped figures in the Brunschwig illustrations is highly suggestive, especially since these had been published years earlier by the same printer, and two of the woodblocks were reused for Fries's much more sparsely illustrated *Spiegel* (figs. 2 and 3). The term "striped layman," as it turns out, was not the physician's own invention. It had emerged in the late fifteenth century from the social satire and sermons of the Strasbourg humanist elite around the lawyer Sebastian Brant (1458–1521), as both a rhetorical and visual trope designating the newly ambitious middling sort.³ Two decades later, it clearly had such currency, at least in the Upper Rhine region, that Fries could invoke it without further explanation. By bringing Grüninger's illustrations for Brunschwig's works into conversation with their text and with local humanists' debates about lay education, this essay investigates the striped layman as a new kind of medical practitioner and reader, and as a central figure in the changing politics of knowledge, print, and lay education at the eve of the Reformation.

I begin by surveying what Brunschwig's texts tell us about likely readers and practitioners. Although his intended audience evolves across his works, I show that it emphasizes the common man, the increasingly confident middling sort in early modern society. Exploring the connotations of the striped layman in visual and textual culture, I uncover elite as well as artisanal anxieties about this figure that are centered around the city of Strasbourg. Turning

² Fries, 1518, sig. A1^r: "den gestreiffelten leyen."

³ Schmid Blumer.



Figure 1. A practitioner dressed in stripes performing abdominal surgery. Hieronymus Brunschwig, *Cirurgia* (Strasbourg, 1494), fol. 78^r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Inc. c.a 3452.

to the local visual culture of print, I survey the Grüninger press's vast output of woodcut images and its deliberate use of stripes as a social label, which enables one to read the images in Brunschwig's volumes as a carefully crafted visual argument. Mapping clearly onto Brunschwig's audience of common men, the woodcuts speak more decisively than the text itself to the agency of the striped layman as a reader and practitioner of medicine.

One important objective of my approach is to refocus scholarly attention on printed images that are often overlooked or not taken seriously as historical sources. Art historians have paid detailed attention to early Alsatian woodcuts,



Figure 2. Striped practitioner preparing medicines. Lorenz Fries, *Spiegel der Artzney* (Strasbourg, 1518), fol. 89^v. Wellcome Library, London.

categorizing and tracing their stylistic characteristics over time.⁴ This provides valuable clues to possible commissioning and publishing practices, but tells us little about the images' social meaning. More recently, scholars have begun to investigate the interplay of text and image in early publications of the classics, such as Grüninger's edition of Virgil's complete works.⁵ Images of everyday work, such as those in Brunschwig's works, are often dismissed as merely decorative, with little relation to the text. To contemporary eyes, however, they were imbued with social meaning—meaning that can be recovered, as I aim to show, by reading the images against the background of local visual

⁴ Kristeller; Dupeux, who expands and refines Kristeller's categories.

⁵ Halporn; Zimmermann-Homeyer.



Figure 3. A surgeon bleeding a patient. Fries, *Spiegel der Artzney* (Strasbourg, 1518), fol. 71v. Wellcome Library, London.

sensibilities. Building on Verena Schmid Blumer's illuminating study of the stripe as a powerful metaphor at the intersection of visual and verbal rhetoric,⁶ my exploration of the striped layman as a reader of vernacular medicine provides a deeper understanding of the social and epistemic identities of an intriguing figure that played a crucial part in the history of humanist reform and lay education.⁷

The story of the striped layman and his hybrid expertise of hand and mind contributes to larger narratives in the history of science, about different forms of knowledge, their relationship, their contemporary articulation and reception. In particular, it engages ongoing conversations about the epistemic practices of, for example, artisans, artists, and alchemists vis-à-vis learned traditions.⁸ In the history of medicine, the striped layman as a new type of reader and practitioner represents an early example of the rise of experiential and practical knowledge,

⁶ Schmid Blumer draws on an impressive range of visual and textual primary sources to recover the social identity and agency of the figure of the striped layman in the context of Reformation pamphlets.

⁷ Chrisman, 81–122; Müller, 1980; Schreiner.

⁸ On artisanal knowledge, see in particular Dupré; Long; Smith; Smith, Cook, and Meyers. See also Harkness on cultures of practical knowledge in Elizabethan England.

particularly in non-academic contexts that have been the subject of recent scholarly attention.⁹ The use of images to make a social argument about the value of experience provides a complementary narrative to scholarship on printed images as epistemic arguments and vehicles for experiential and observational knowledge in botany and anatomy.¹⁰ Finally, the emergence of the striped layman is fundamentally a story about early vernacular print and its audiences, especially in medicine, helping to sharpen the contours of a frequently invoked but elusive readership of the common man in the early modern German lands and beyond.¹¹

MEDICAL BOOKS FOR ASPIRING CRAFTSMEN AND ORDINARY CITIZENS

Brunschwig's first work, the *Cirurgia*, published in 1497, was intended to bolster the practical education of surgeons through technical instructions and a modicum of theoretical knowledge about the human body. This focus on craftsmen and their manual skill is underlined by several woodcuts of men dressed in stripes performing surgical tasks (e.g., [fig. 1](#)). Brunschwig's plague treatise, the *Liber Pestentialis* (1500), is addressed to a similar audience of "young prospective master surgeons and barbers," this time explicitly excluding "the learned . . . because they have greater and better things to do."¹² In addition to this audience of artisan professionals, the *Liber Pestentialis* also includes recipes for people without any medical training, the "common citizens" of Strasbourg and the "common man in villages and castles."¹³ Brunschwig makes a genuine effort to write for ordinary people—for example, with a recipe for "pomanders for the common citizen," which comes in a range of alternative versions, catering to various levels of access to practitioners, pharmacy shops, and medicinal simples.¹⁴ Many of these instructions are centered around the home and the household ([fig. 4](#)).

⁹ On experience and observation in science and medicine, see, e.g., Daston and Lunbeck; Dear; Park; Pomata and Siraisi; Pomata, 2011. For more recent work on recipe culture and non-academic medical practices, see Leong, 2018; Rankin, 2013.

¹⁰ Kusukawa 2006 and 2012; Ogilvie.

¹¹ The literature on early modern medical books and readers is vast and growing; see Fissell, 1992 and 2007; Leong, 2014; Rankin, 2011; Telle. Two recent treatments of print and medical authority are Heinrichs; Murphy.

¹² Brunschwig, 1500b, sig. A3^r: "den iungen angonden meistern vnn wund ertzt vnn scherern"; "die gelerten . . . wan sie vil anders groessers vnn merers zuo schaffen haben."

¹³ Brunschwig, 1500b, fol. 15^{r-v}: "für die gemeinen burger"; "für den gemeinen man in schloesser doerffer."

¹⁴ Brunschwig, 1500b, sig. D3^r: "pomum ambre für die gemeinen burger."



Figure 4. Household measures against the plague. Brunschwig, *Liber Pestentialis* (Strasbourg, 1500), fol. 7^v. © Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg i. Br., Historische Sammlungen, Ink.4. T 3873,b.

In the preface to the *Liber de Arte Distillandi de Simplicibus* (better known as the *Small Book of Distillation*), also published in 1500, Brunschwig recommends his work to “those who desire to learn the manner and art of distillation and to begin this work.”¹⁵ In his second distillation manual, *Liber de Arte Distillandi de Compositis* (known as the *Large Book of Distillation*) of 1512, Brunschwig says about the *Small Book* that it was intended “for the commoner, that is to say the layman, who does not have doctors.”¹⁶ Indeed, the *Small Book* includes distilled waters “for the common man who has neither doctor nor

¹⁵ Brunschwig, 1500a, sig. A2^{r-v}: “die do begeren zuo leren die maß vnn kunst der distillierung diß werks an zefahlen.”

¹⁶ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 2^v: “für den gemeinen / als für den leyen / vnd nit habenden artzet.”

medicine, and could not pay for it,”¹⁷ and deliberately glosses over a complex water bath still, which “is not for the common man.”¹⁸ The title-page woodcut illustrates this intended audience: it shows an herb garden in which two simple distillation furnaces have been set up (fig. 5). Several men, three of whom are wearing stripes, and two women are engaged in various stages of producing medicinal waters. In the rolling landscape, they are surrounded by an abundance of plants and animals from which to extract medicinal virtues, and for all its busy activity, the scene is one of bucolic leisure more than routine business. Distillation was not necessarily the common man’s main occupation, although it was an important one.

In its second and third editions (1505 and 1509), the *Small Book* appears as part of a larger volume, together with a German translation of the first two parts of Marsilio Ficino’s *Book of Life*. These editions include a treatise on more complex composite distilled waters and a collection of medical recipes, both likely written by Brunschwig.¹⁹ While the recipes are aimed at people “in villages and castles who cannot reach a large town with an apothecary,”²⁰ other additions deal with more sophisticated procedures, such as making potable gold or extracting the quintessence of a medicinal herb. Together with the medical writings of so eminent a natural philosopher as Ficino, this gives the volume a distinctly grander and more learned bent. Nonetheless, the introduction to Ficino’s text sets out the concessions that have been made to accommodate a non-academic audience. Only the first two of Ficino’s three books on the preservation of life are included, because “the third book is about life which comes from heaven. . . . This requires high understanding and is therefore left out here.”²¹ The 1505 and 1509 volumes are still aimed at a non-academic audience, but this time also address laymen who have set their sights on slightly higher things, such as the “medicine of the three magi,” made with real frankincense, gold, and myrrh.²² Accordingly, the central figure on the top of the title page appears wealthier in his generously cut striped coat than the distilling workmen, familiar from the *Small Book*’s first edition, who appear in the lower half (fig. 6). The addressee of the translator’s dedicatory letter, one Heinrich,

¹⁷ Brunschwig, 1500a, sig. E1^r: “für den gemeynen menschen / der weder artzet noch artzneney haben mag / auch nit zuo bezalen.”

¹⁸ Brunschwig, 1500a, sig. D2^r: “ist nit für den gemeynen man.” On Brunschwig’s techniques suitable for the common man, see also Müller-Grzenda, 72.

¹⁹ Brunschwig and Ficino, 1505 and 1509.

²⁰ Brunschwig and Ficino, 1509, sig. A1^v: “vff den doerffern vnd schloessern die ein grosse stat mit einer apoteck nit wol erreichen moegen.”

²¹ Brunschwig and Ficino, 1509, sig. X3^v: “vnnd das dritte buoch / sagt von dem leben von himmel herab. . . . Das gar hoch zuo verston ist / deßhalb hie vß gelon.”

²² Brunschwig and Ficino, 1509, fol. 167^r: “artznei der heiligen drei könig Magi gnant.”

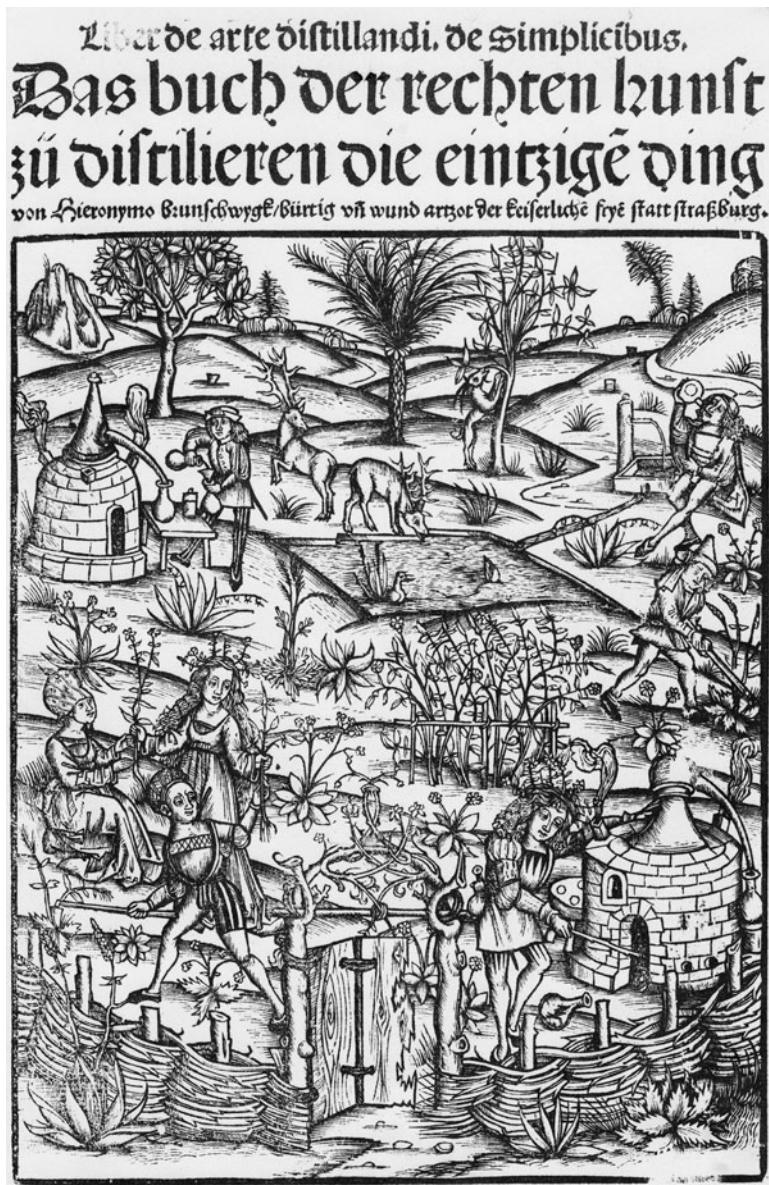


Figure 5. Title page of the *Small Book*. Brunschwig, *Liber de Arte Distillandi de Simplicibus* (Strasbourg, 1500). Wikimedia Commons.

Count of Werdenberg, might point to a target audience including a wealthier clientele with an interest in the pricier and more philosophical aspects of medical distillation.



Figure 6. Title page used for the enlarged 1505 and 1509 editions of the *Small Book*.
Wikimedia Commons.

In the first edition of the *Small Book*, Brunschwig alluded to plans for his eventual magnum opus: "in good time I will also publish the large book for learned people of this work."²³ Indeed, the 1512 *Large Book of Distillation* devotes a full twenty-two chapters to different procedures for making quintessences and the alchemical theory behind them.²⁴ Learned medicine is

²³ Brunschwig, 1500a, sig. C1^v: "Aber dz groß buoch ich auch sehen will lassen zuo siner zyt den gelernten diß wercks."

²⁴ Taape.

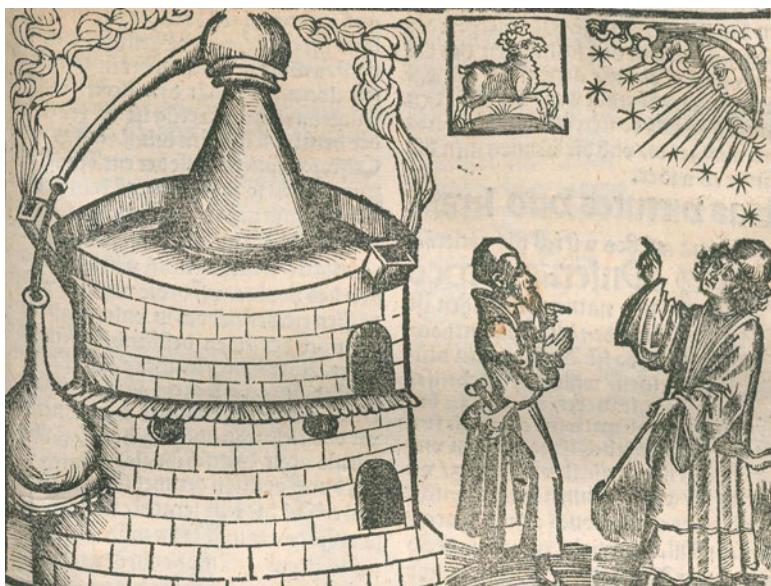


Figure 7. Scholars, furnace, and zodiac sign. Brunschwig, *Liber de Arte Distillandi de Compositis* (Strasbourg, 1512), fol. 144^r. Wellcome Library, London.

represented in numerous woodcuts of physicians advising patients or inspecting urine, and in a series of composite images illustrating astrologically propitious times to distill certain remedies (fig. 7). Some of the described cures are specifically intended for “internal medicine, which belongs to the physician.”²⁵ The distillation processes themselves are often more complex than those described in the previous works, including precisely the kind of large bain-marie that Brunschwig dismissed as too challenging for the common man in the *Small Book*.

Despite the *Large Book*’s greater ambition and scope, Brunschwig still emphasizes a lay readership: “this book and other books that I have made are for the commoner and those who do not have a learned and experienced doctor who can determine a person’s complexion and disease.”²⁶ Intriguingly, he then says that there is no need to explain these finer points of learned diagnosis in the book, because it is “for the commoner, that is the layman, who does not seek to

²⁵ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 140^r: “in der inern artzeny / welche zuogehoerig seint dem phisico.”

²⁶ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 56^v: “Darvmb diß buoch vnn ander bücher von mir gemacht / für den gemeinen vnn die da nit haben oder haben moegen einen gelerten vnd erfarenen artzet / der da erkenen ist die complex vnd kranckheit des menschen.”

learn how to help other people, but only to help himself.”²⁷ Whether or not Brunschwig genuinely conceived of a strictly self-treating readership, this comment certainly worked to preempt allegations of facilitating the kind of inexpert quackery that physicians so often deplored.

The claims about intended readers are most obvious in the “Thesaurus Pauperum,” the final part of the *Large Book*. Translating the title, Brunschwig states that it is intended as a “treasury of poor people’s medicine, and also for those who live in small towns and villages, and who cannot obtain high medicine.”²⁸ The introduction to the “Thesaurus” presents the entertaining (if unlikely) story of its genesis. Exhausted from the effort of writing the first four parts of the book, Brunschwig says, he fell asleep at his desk, only to wake up in a dream, to a clamor of voices:

I heard screaming and shouting: “How entirely you have neglected us!” I awoke, saying “Who are you?”—“We are the poor.”—“Who are the poor?”—“Those who haven’t a penny to their name.”—“Who else?”—“We are the peasants from the villages.”—“Who else?”—“We are those living in castles and small towns. Although we have enough money, we have neither healers nor medicine to help us.”²⁹

The woodcut on the first page of the “Thesaurus” (fig. 8) illustrates the slumbering author surrounded by his supplicants, including a woman clasping her hands, a penniless peasant in ragged clothes, and a well-dressed knight, standing in for the denizens of remote towns and castles. He holds a letter in his hand, suggesting perhaps that distance often forces him to seek medical advice in writing.

To summarize, Brunschwig developed a range of audiences throughout his works. While the *Cirurgia* addressed surgeons already enrolled in guild training, the *Liber Pestentialis* and *Small Book of Distillation* provided straightforward instructions for the common man with little or no prior experience. The subsequent presentations of the *Small Book* extend their reach to include wealthier

²⁷ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 56^v: “für den gemeinen als für den leyen / die da nit begerren zuo lernen ander menschen zuo helffen sunder allein im helffen wil.”

²⁸ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 283^r: “schatz der armen Artzny / Vnd auch deren / die da vff den schlossen / vnd in den cleinen stetlin / vnn dörffern wonen / Die da nit wol die hohen artzny erreichen mögen.”

²⁹ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 283^r: “schreigen vnnd rüffen ich hort / Wie gar / wie gar / wie gar hast du vnßer vergessen / Ich erwacht / Sprechende / Wer seind ir / Wir seint die armen / wer seint die armen / Die weder haller noch pfennig haben / Wer me / wir seind die bauleüt / aufß den doerffern / Wer me / wir seind die von den schlossen vnnd vß den cleinen stettlin / Wan wir schon zimlich gelt hont / haben wir doch weder artzet noch die Ertzney / das wir vnß mügen behelffen.”



Figure 8. Brunschwig asleep at his desk in the dream scene from the “Thesaurus Pauperum.” Brunschwig, *Liber de Arte Distillandi de Compositis*, fol. 283^r. Wellcome Library, London.

and more ambitious readers, and *The Large Book* aims to include learned readers interested in theoretical questions about distillation and alchemical theory. Some of the more complex processes, moreover, require elaborate and expensive equipment and precious ingredients. Brunschwig’s books thus found a likely audience among the tolerably well-educated, moderately wealthy, and leisured sort. Running like a thread through the range of audiences in Brunschwig’s works, however, the common man is the most frequently and consistently addressed reader.

Although the term *common man* is used frequently in the Renaissance, especially as the addressee of vernacular publications, it does not correspond to clearly defined categories.³⁰ A closer look at Brunschwig’s use of the term will be helpful to determine what kinds of readers he had in mind. It is clear that he does not take *common* to mean “everyone.” By addressing his advice to

³⁰ Roper.

the “common citizen,” he associates being common with a citizen’s status in urban society, consolidated by military duties and taxes.³¹ While the common man is thus demarcated from day laborers, the poor, and, in some places, dis-honorable trades like the executioner, he is also distinct from the wealthy elite. After all, part of Brunschwig’s mission is to provide for “the common people who cannot pay for medicine.”³² Furthermore, by spelling out that a particular remedy is intended “for the common man in castles and villages, and also for the rich,” Brunschwig implies that the common and the wealthy are not the same.³³ In other cases, however, he presumes at least a modest amount of disposable income that can be spent on medicine—for example, when he gives an alternative recipe for incense balls: “these are not as costly as the above, and are for the common man who can get to an apothecary and can afford to pay for it.”³⁴ Neither a member of the wealthy ruling classes nor a destitute farmhand, Brunschwig’s common man is of middling wealth and social status.

The same is true for the level of education expected of common men. Brunschwig often elides common and laypeople, and where they appear alongside putative erudite readers, they are clearly demarcated from them.³⁵ Brunschwig himself only had rudimentary Latin, and it is clear that he did not expect more of his readers. He provides the German equivalents for anatomical terms and medicinal ingredients, and stresses the importance of careful disambiguation. In the *Large Book*, he provides an extensive errata list, so that the reader “may be spared what happened to me when I was reading medical books printed in Latin.”³⁶ While Brunschwig’s common man was literate in the vernacular and thus fairly well educated by early modern standards, his lack of Latin separated him from the learned elite. So did his limited understanding of Galenic theory: Brunschwig reasons that even if he were to attempt an explanation of the finer points of diagnosis, it would likely be “more harmful than useful for the commoner.”³⁷ Neither a scholar nor a complete ignoramus,

³¹ Brunschwig, 1500b, fol. 15^r: “die gemeinen burger.” On citizenship in Strasbourg, see Mariotte, 119–21. On the associated duties and taxes, see Heitz and Spach, 13–21.

³² Brunschwig, 1500a, sig. C1^v: “für die gemeynen menschen die die ertzeny nit zuo bezalen habent.”

³³ Brunschwig, 1500b, fol. 15^{r–v}: “für den gemeinen man in schloesser doerffer auch für die rychen.”

³⁴ Brunschwig, 1500b, fol. 14^v: “die sindt nit als koestlich als die obern vnd sind für den gmeinen man der die apotecken erreichen vnd das bezalen mag.”

³⁵ E.g., Brunschwig, 1512, fols. 2^v, 56^v.

³⁶ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 357^r: “vff das dir nit geschehe wie mir / so ich lesen was die bücher der artzney / getruckt in lateinische zungen.”

³⁷ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 56^v: “aber dem gemeinen . . . me schedlich dan nutzlich ist.”

Brunschwig's common man was on respectable middle ground with regard to education.

This distinction between lay and learned knowledge is most clearly drawn in the introduction to the "Thesaurus Pauperum": since people often cannot get "high medicine," Brunschwig writes, "I teach in this book how anyone may heal themselves with common medicine."³⁸ Although "common medicine" could mitigate the lack of "high medicine," the two were distinct.³⁹ This clear separation, however, belies Brunschwig's subtle but confident attempts to erode this boundary. As I show below, his books intervene in the politics of medical knowledge by introducing the common man to learned concepts and jargon.

Brunschwig's common medicine for the common man speaks to notions of what it could mean to be common—notions that were clearly important to early moderns but have proved somewhat elusive to historians. As Lyndal Roper has shown, the use of the phrase *common man* does not map onto well-defined or consistent categories; rather, its sense of community and belonging was negotiated in specific contexts.⁴⁰ In the history of print, it has been noted that the sixteenth century saw an increase in vernacular publications, addressed specifically to the common man of middling income and social standing, representing those 20 or so percent of the population who did not have access to learned physicians but could afford the services of lower rungs of practitioners, such as surgeons, as well as recipe books and some remedies.⁴¹ As the household became an increasingly more significant social unit over the sixteenth century, the common man was increasingly identified with the *hausvater*, the father of the house, whose duties included some level of medical provisioning.⁴²

Brunschwig's mission to provide common medicine for the common man—surgeons, home distillers, and householders—thus anticipates a major development in medical publishing. It targets a demographic that was about to become, during the early decades of the sixteenth century, one of the most important audiences of vernacular print, and especially books on medicine. One of the first medical authors to use the German language, Brunschwig writes for a

³⁸ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 283^r: "hohen artzny"; "deshalb ich in disem buoch lere / wie sich ein yeder gnuogsamlich mit gemeiner Artzny erneren mag." While *ernähren* means "nourish" in modern German, in the medieval and early modern periods it could mean "to save" or "heal." See *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1961), s.v. *ernähren*: <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=ernaehren>.

³⁹ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 283^r: "gemeiner Artzny"; "hohen artzny."

⁴⁰ Roper.

⁴¹ Friedrich and Müller-Jahncke, 79–92, 100–01; Schenda; Telle, esp. 51–52. On the common man as a reader of practical literature, see also Eamon, 99–102.

⁴² Roper, 20; Schenda, 10–13; Telle, 108–09.

literate—but not Latinate—audience, sandwiched between the uneducated poor and elites of greater wealth, influence, and learning. The visual trope of the striped layman, I argue, represents this liminal but increasingly confident layer of early modern society in Brunschwig's books. Using their numerous printed images as historical sources affords a clearer picture of Brunschwig's intended audience, and of his politics of knowledge and practice with respect to nonlearned readers of printed books.

“SHAMEFUL GARMENTS” AND AMBITIOUS FOOLS: STRIPED FIGURES IN PRINT CULTURE

Like many of Grüninger's publications, Brunschwig's works are lavishly illustrated. In addition to plants, tools, flasks, and furnaces, many of the woodcuts show people in the act of making medicines or stitching up wounds. In this array of human figures, the frequently recurring depiction of striped clothing stands out. Overall, fourteen different images show at least one striped person. The artistic execution of these stripes is calculated to jump out at the viewer: the broad, unbroken black strokes stand in marked contrast to the extremely fine lines and intricate hatching used to depict other garments, such as fur-trimmed robes (e.g., *fig. 1*). Taking into account Michel Pastoureau's claim that stripes were inherently visually disruptive and even offensive to medieval visual sensibilities, the striped garments in these woodcuts may have been doubly striking to a reader around the turn of the sixteenth century.⁴³

What is the meaning of this conspicuous visual label, which appears so frequently in Brunschwig's works? The only direct clue comes, as noted above, from Lorenz Fries's *Mirror of Medicine* of 1518, which refers to the striped layman in a way that suggests that the trope had currency in the verbal as well as visual language of Brunschwig's time and place. To investigate what this figure signifies in the images of Brunschwig's books, it is necessary first to understand what it meant to be striped in the German lands at the turn of the sixteenth century. Histories of clothing and visual culture have afforded important insights into the evocative nature of stripes.⁴⁴ I am relying in particular on Verena Schmid Blumer's exploration of the visual metaphor of stripes and its rhetorical cognate in early sixteenth-century pamphlets and humanist writings.⁴⁵

⁴³ Pastoureau, 17, 27–28, argues that stripes disrupt the usual medieval way of reading images in layers because they allow no distinction into a background and foreground plane.

⁴⁴ For a *longue durée* history of striped clothes, see Pastoureau. For an overview of stripes in early modern dress, see Rublack, 2010, 103–06.

⁴⁵ Schmid Blumer.

The fashion depicted in Grüninger's woodcuts—short doublets worn with tight-fitting, striped hose—originated at the late medieval courts of Northern Italy, and was likely introduced to the German lands by Emperor Maximilian's new mercenary infantry, the lansquenets, in the late fifteenth century. Until they began to disappear in the latter half of the sixteenth century, striped and slashed garments were fashionable among wealthy urban citizens, especially merchants and affluent craftsmen, and newly wealthy farmers. Originally a courtly display, striped clothes had filtered down to a growing middle layer of society with an increasingly assertive self-awareness expressed through fashionable dress.⁴⁶

These sartorial developments were met with apprehension among secular and religious authorities alike. Sumptuary regulations are rife with public outrage caused by the new fashion.⁴⁷ Strasbourg, Brunschwig's home town, was no exception. In a 1493 ordinance, the city council complains that “nowadays some menfolk who have no fear of God wear dishonourable, shameful garments,”⁴⁸ referring to the kind of short doublet that was often combined with striped hose and codpieces.⁴⁹ Another, undated ordinance explicitly states that “no one shall wear divided [i.e., parti-colored] hose.”⁵⁰ Although they had become part of mainstream fashion by the end of the fifteenth century, striped clothes became a symbolic thorn in the side of political and intellectual elites. In a world where visible traits were thought to reflect essential internal characteristics, clothes were read as the expression of a person's place in society and their moral character.⁵¹ To the learned and the powerful, stripes heralded the disruption of the social order by a newly confident and ambitious middling sort.⁵²

These concerns crystallized in the social satire and sermons by humanist writers from Strasbourg. Despite the absence of a university, the city was a center of learning and publishing. The lawyer and satirist Sebastian Brant, having written and published his immensely successful *Narrenschiff* (*Ship of Fools*) in Basel in 1494, returned to his native Strasbourg in 1501, and gathered around him a circle of humanists with shared visions of social and educational

⁴⁶ Pastoureau, 41–44; Schmid Blumer, 209.

⁴⁷ Pastoureau, 7–16.

⁴⁸ Archives de la Ville et la Communauté Urbaine de Strasbourg, 1MR 2, fol. 128^r: “Als sich yetz begin das ettlich mannes personen die gots vorcht nit habent vnerbere schampere cleyder tragent.”

⁴⁹ Schmid Blumer, 209.

⁵⁰ Archives de la Ville et la Communauté Urbaine de Strasbourg, 1MR 20, fol. 14^r: “es ensol ouch keiner kein gedeilten hosen dragen.”

⁵¹ Schmid Blumer, 201.

⁵² On the social connotations of stripes and the response to the new fashion, see Schmid Blumer, 214–37.

reform. The preacher Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg (1445–1510), for example, broke with clerical tradition by delivering a series of sermons based on his colleague's *Ship of Fools*—a secular work—in the Strasbourg cathedral, and another member of the circle, Johannes Pauli, wrote them down from memory and eventually published them in German. Brant's satire inspired another cleric, Thomas Murner (1475–ca. 1537), to write his own satirical verse. Murner, too, preached on secular German texts, and had been drawn to Strasbourg by the well-known theologian and educational reformer Jakob Wimpfeling (1450–1528), although they later fell out over a disagreement regarding the pedagogic merits of Murner's didactic card game for law students.⁵³

In their discussions of the social meaning of clothing, the Strasbourg humanists used visual as well as verbal rhetoric. Brant in particular made extensive use of images in his publications. Acting as scholarly advisor for an illustrated edition of the comedies of the Roman playwright Terence in the early 1490s, he designed the pictorial program as well as the presentation of the text. The edition was never printed, but a number of the surviving woodblocks bear annotations in Brant's own hand on the reverse, indicating the beginning of the passage where he intended the image to be inserted in the text.⁵⁴ Thus, when Brant wrote in the preface of his *Ship of Fools* of 1494 that it was populated with fools “whose image I have made,” he likely did not mean this in a purely metaphorical way, but as a claim to authorship of the images as well as the verse.⁵⁵ In a German translation of Petrarch's *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae* (Remedies against both fortunes), printed in Augsburg in 1532, the publisher advertised that the “wondrously pleasant figures” were made “according to visual indication by the highly learned late Dr. Sebastian Brant,” suggesting that the erudite editor had guided the illustrators' hands by way of sketches.⁵⁶ In Strasbourg, Brant struck up a fruitful and lasting collaboration with Brunschwig's printer Johann Grüninger, producing such monuments of illustrated print as the complete works of Virgil and an edition of Terence's comedies that, this time, made it into print.⁵⁷

⁵³ On Brant, see Rosenfeld. On the Strasbourg humanists, see Chrisman, 81–102; Martin.

⁵⁴ For a recent overview of the literature on the unpublished Terence woodcuts, see Rockenberger.

⁵⁵ Brant, 1494, sig. a2v: “Der bildniß ich hab har gemacht.”

⁵⁶ Cited in Zimmermann-Homeyer, 56: “Wunderlustparlichen figurenn”; “nach visierlicher Angebung des hochgelehrten Doctors Sebastiani Brant seligen.” It was not unusual for learned editors of this time to provide sketches. See also Kristeller, 32.

⁵⁷ On Brant's involvement in printed illustrations, see Zimmermann-Homeyer, 55–57, 233–34.

The Strasbourg humanists' visual rhetoric in text and image vividly expressed their concerns about recent social change. Brant devotes an entire chapter of the *Ship of Fools* to "new fashions," especially a recent fad for "indecent short-cut coats / which hardly cover the navel."⁵⁸ The accompanying woodcut shows a young man in a doublet decorated with stripes, contemplating himself in a mirror held by a fool (fig. 9). This new fashion was not only vain, but also transgressed social boundaries. In a later chapter on the foolishness of peasants, Brant writes, "rough linen is no longer to their taste / . . . it has to be clothes from London or Mechelen / all slashed and lined with all sorts of colors."⁵⁹ The same woodcut reappears in Thomas Murner's *Narrenbeschwörung* (Adjuration of fools) to illustrate the author's pointed criticism of common citizens affecting to dress like nobles. They are no better than so many "horse droppings . . . floating down from Strasbourg," each clinging to the ridiculous notion "that he wants to be an apple, too, and float among apples in the Rhine."⁶⁰ Sharing Brant's visual and textual discourse on ambitious fools, Murner specifically points to Strasbourg as the source of these bad apples.

In his sermons on Brant's *Ship of Fools*, Johann Geiler emulates and elaborates this satirical language of stripes, vanity, and disruptive behavior. Cataloging the different types of fools in Brant's book, Geiler dedicates individual sermons to each of these "crowds," such as the "climbing fools" seeking to outdo their parents and neighbors: "the peasant leaves behind his father's garb and thinks up something new; the craftsman clothes himself and his wife like a knight."⁶¹ Garments were increasingly aspirational, and could be downright deceptive. People made themselves appear taller by wearing thick soles and tall hats "made of three pieces put together."⁶² Others sought to appear more lavishly dressed than they should be, sporting hose "divided like a chess board, pieced together from small patches so that they cost more to make than the

⁵⁸ Brant, 1494, sig. A8^r: "schaentlich vnd beschrotten roeck // Das einer kum den nabel bdoeck." Since single virgules are frequently used as punctuation in the original, I am using double forward slashes to indicate line breaks in the poem, while single forward slashes in the translations represent line breaks.

⁵⁹ Brant, 1494, sig. o3^v: "In schmeckt der zwilch nit wol / als ee . . . Es muoß sin lundsch / vnd mechelsch kleit // Vnd gantz zerhacket / vnd gespreit // Mit aller varb." See also Schmid Blumer, 233.

⁶⁰ Murner, 1512, sigs. k2^v–k3^r: "Roßdreck . . . von straßburg har geschwummen"; "Das er ouch wil ein apffel syn // Vnd mit den oepffeln schwimpt im ryn."

⁶¹ Geiler von Kaysersberg, 1520, fol. 165^v: "Der puer verlaßt das cleid seins vatters vnd erdenckt etwas nüwes. Der handwercksman bekleidet sich vnd sein weib wie ein ritter."

⁶² Geiler von Kaysersberg, 1520, fol. 29^r: "von dreien stücken zuosamen gesetzt."



Figure 9. Fashionable fool dressed in striped fabrics. Sebastian Brant, *Das Narren schyff* (Basel, 1494), sig. A7^v. Wikimedia Commons.

cloth is worth.”⁶³ Anything slashed, striped, checkered, or cobbled together was not honest work, but calculated to dazzle and to obscure the true value of persons and materials.

By the middle of the century, both the striped fashion and its moral connotations had spread beyond the Upper Rhine. The well-known 1555 pamphlet *Vom Hosen Teuffel* (On the trouser devil), published by Lutheran preacher

⁶³ Geiler von Kaysersberg, 1520, fol. 28^v: “geteilt wie ein schachbret wie von kleinen bletzlin sie zammen gestücket seint also dz sie me kosten zemachen den das thuoch wert ist.”

Andreas Musculus (1514–81) in Frankfurt (Oder), in many ways epitomizes the Strasbourg humanists' moral verdict on stripes. People who harbor “evil desires,” Musculus writes, “outwardly express what is in their hearts through clothing.”⁶⁴ The “trouser devil” of the title is depicted in ostentatious garments that mark a change in the striped fashion: by the middle of the century, tight-fitting striped and parti-colored hose had given way to puffed sleeves and trousers with stripes created by slashes in the material, revealing an underlayer of fabric in a contrasting color (fig. 10). These new stripes, too, were read as a sign of moral shortcomings. A mere mercenary lansquenet, Musculus complains, will happily waste ninety-nine ells of fine silk on the lining of “hellish flames” for a single garment, not least because the number ninety-nine is “good lansquenetese,” and rolls impressively off the braggard’s tongue.⁶⁵

While some local lords indulged the fashion, Musculus praises those who ruled “that all executioners in their lands shall dress in this knavish and slovenly manner, and wear hose with hellish flaps that reach the shoes, so that even the children in the street can judge what they should think of them when they see such shabby trouser-donzzels.”⁶⁶ As Kathy Stuart has shown, executioners were seen as dishonorable in many medieval and early modern communities. To touch someone who dealt with criminals and dead bodies could physically pollute a person’s honor, and many city magistrates in the German lands ordered executioners to wear recognizable clothes so that honorable citizens could give them a wide berth.⁶⁷ By forcing the dishonorable to wear stripes, the authorities hoped to deflate popular enthusiasm for the new fashion (just as Musculus writes), usually with limited success.⁶⁸ This explains how stripes became associated with the executioner’s dishonor (an association that is also clear in Grüninger’s woodcuts, discussed below) and with the social striving of the middling sort: the executioner’s stripes were the ruling authorities’

⁶⁴ Musculus, sig. C2^r: “Was sie im hertzen haben / auch eusserlich mit der kleidung . . . erweisen.” Signature citations refer to the second edition of 1556.

⁶⁵ Musculus, sig. C3^v: “hellischen flammen,” “guth Landsknechtisch.” On the *Hosen Teuffel* pamphlet, see also Schmid Blumer, 223–25.

⁶⁶ Musculus, sig. E1^r: “das sich alle hencker in iren Landen / also buebisch vnd zuludert sollen kleiden / solche hosen antragen / das die hellischen lappen die schue erreichen / Damit auch die kinder auff der gassen koennen vrteilen / wenn sie solche Lumpiche hosen junckern sehen / wo fuer sie die sollen halten vnd ansehen.”

⁶⁷ Stuart, esp. 41–42, 44–53, 189–99.

⁶⁸ Pastoureau, 13; Schmid Blumer, 225–32.



Figure 10. The *Trouser Devil* pamphlet warned of the depravity lurking behind fashionable striped dress. *Vom Hosen Teuffel* (Frankfurt, 1555), title page. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Res/Gall.g. 304#Beibd.3

reaction to the aspirational stripes of the layman, highlighting the evocative and affective nature of stripes as a social label.

From Brant onward, stripes signaled questions about knowledge and education as well as wealth and status. The fool who overestimates and overstates his own learning is central to the *Narrenschiff*, epitomized by Brant's well-known verse:

One finds many a fool
 Who tinges folly with writings [i.e., learning]
 And thinks himself striped and learned
 As soon as he has turned over some books
 He has all but devoured the psalter
 Up to the verse “Beatus vir.”⁶⁹

Using highly visual language, Brant describes the pretentious fool, who has not got past the first verse of the psalter, as covering up his ignorance with an outward appearance of learning, expressed through striped clothes.

Johann Geiler, in another sermon on the *Ship of Fools*, elaborates the trope and unpacks what it means to be (or to aspire to be) striped and learned. Preaching on the theme of deluded fools who think themselves more learned than they are, Geiler calls them “striped laymen,” coining the phrase later used by Fries to describe his target audience. The Latin version of the sermons renders these fools as “laici semidocti”—“half-learned laymen.”⁷⁰ The layman’s stripes reflect this half-learned status: rather than being of any one color, he is half ignorant and half educated, a liminal character somewhere between illiterate peasants and the learned elite.⁷¹

To Geiler and his fellow humanists, this half learning was a sign of intellectual hubris. In theology in particular, Geiler writes, this has given rise to “errors and heresies” because “many want to be too learned, and expect too much of their own brains.”⁷² In the *Adjuration of Fools*, Thomas Murner dedicates a chapter to the striped layman who declares, “I once ate a school bag, so I can never forget my Latin,” not realizing that “Latin, too, can make fools.”⁷³ He

⁶⁹ Brant, 1494, sigs. i6^v–i7^t: “Man fyndt gar manchen narren ouch // Der ferbet vß der gschrift den gouch // Vnd dunckt sich stryffecht vnd gelert // So er die buocher hat vmb kert // Vnd hat den psaltrer gessen schyer // Biß and den verß / Beatus vir.”

⁷⁰ Geiler von Kaysersberg, 1520, sig. Z2^t: “die gestreifletten leyen”; Geiler von Kaysersberg, 1510, sig. Z3^v. Both cited in Schmid Blumer, 241.

⁷¹ Schmid Blumer, 237–44.

⁷² Geiler von Kaysersberg, 1520, sig. Z1^v: “irrungen vnd ketzereyen”; “dann das etlich zevil gelert wolten sein / hofften zeul in ir eigen hirn.”

⁷³ Murner, 1512, sig. p1^r: “Ich hab eins mals ein schuolsack fressen // Das ichs latyns nit kan vergessen”; sig. p1^v: “das latyn ouch narren macht.”

only knows “four words of Latin,” but he “spouts them everywhere,” asking “sharp questions” about the holy Trinity and the virgin birth.⁷⁴ To the Strasbourg humanists, the striped layman was a vain and dangerous fool who cobbled together a Latinate education and dabbled in matters he could not possibly understand. He deluded himself and others in his patchy understanding of scripture, and dared to query the teachings of learned clergy.⁷⁵

As well as grasping for learned knowledge, the layman had a distinct form of knowledge of his own, based on experience of the world rather than textual study. In Brant’s satire, the fool’s pretence to be “striped and learned”—“stryf-fecht und gelert” in the original German—is rendered as “docti tamen atque periti” in the Latin translation published three years later, aligning “striped” (“stryffecht”) with “experienced” or “skilled” (“peritus”).⁷⁶ In German, the key term for this kind of knowledge was *erfarung*. It could refer to knowledge in a general sense but, etymologically related to the verb *fahren* (to travel), it specifically denoted impressions, experiences, or knowledge gathered by displacing oneself in the world, as part of a *vita activa*.⁷⁷

Although experience had a place in the epistemologies of such serious thinkers as Nicolaus Cusanus, the Strasbourg humanists did not view it favorably. In a chapter “on the *erfarung* of all lands,” Brant admonishes those who seek to measure the world in their travels but neglect to plumb the depth of their own souls.⁷⁸ Geiler, too, writes of the “dithering fools” obsessed with external experiences—different places, new things, and useless books—that rendered them “inconstant in mind” and jeopardized their bodily and spiritual well-being.⁷⁹ Developing Augustine’s criticism of *vana curiositas*, the early humanists maintained that experience and travel distracted from salvation through introspection and self-knowledge.⁸⁰ To them, *erfarung* was the epistemology of the illiterate, inferior to rational inquiry. Over the course of the sixteenth century, experience was revalued from an idle distraction to the necessary labor of insight, especially in medicine and natural history.⁸¹ As I will show,

⁷⁴ Murner, 1512, sig. p1^v: “Doch kan er vier latynscher wort”; sig. p2^r: “Die würfft er vß an allem ort,” “fragt her scharpfe question.”

⁷⁵ On the attitude of the early humanists toward the striped layman, see Schmid Blumer, 240–50.

⁷⁶ Brant, 1494, fol. i6^v; Brant, 1497, fol. 53^v.

⁷⁷ Müller, 1986.

⁷⁸ Brant, 1494, sig. l3^v: “Von erfahrung aller land.”

⁷⁹ Geiler von Kaysersberg, 1520, fol. 80^v: “Wanckelnarren”; “im gemüt ist unstet.”

⁸⁰ Müller, 1986, 312–21. See also Schmid Blumer, 245–50.

⁸¹ Dear; Kintzinger; Müller, 1986, 329–31. On experiential knowledge in medicine, see Jacquart; Pomata, 2005 and 2011; Rankin, 2013, 37–39.

Brunschwig's writing and Grüninger's striped images represent a remarkably early endorsement of the layman's way of knowing.

While the humanists were clearly apprehensive about the striped layman, this does not mean that they were in principle opposed to lay education. In fact, Brant's circle was committed to educational reform and campaigned for a Latin school to be established in Strasbourg.⁸² Geiler not only preached on a secular text (Brant's *Ship of Fools*) but also extemporized in plain German from his Latin notes and had his sermons published in the vernacular.⁸³ In the *Ship of Fools* itself, the striped fool is lampooned not so much for being striped and learned, but rather for his deluded insistence on this half-learned status, which in reality he had not earned. Similarly, while Murner mocks laymen's inadequate Latin, what he ultimately deplores is not that they wished to be educated, but that "in the days of their youth, when they should have been learning Latin and how to ask questions," instead "they went around like louts to woo girls."⁸⁴ Both Brant and Murner were involved in publications explicitly intended for the education of non-Latinate readers. Brant edited and prefaced a German compendium of Roman law titled *Layenspiegel* (Layman's mirror),⁸⁵ and Murner, too, published a vernacular guide to the law for the use of his native Strasbourg, arguing that a mayor or magistrate should not be stymied just because Latin legal works were "so incomprehensible that even the learned barely understand it."⁸⁶ His translation of Ulrich von Hutten's treatise on the French disease suggests that the same charitable impulse extended to medical topics.⁸⁷

Brant's educational mission is noteworthy for being specifically tied to his extensive use of woodcut illustrations. In the *Ship of Fools* he intends to educate his fellow foolish humans by holding up a mirror in which they can recognize their folly. This "mirror of fools" ostensibly even works for "those who perhaps cannot read," because they can "recognize their nature in the image" as a first step to mending their ways.⁸⁸ Like the mirror in which the fashionable striped fool admires himself but also recognizes his folly, the woodcut illustrations reveal readers' true foolish characters to themselves (fig. 9). Brant's didactic and mnemonic use of images is epitomized in the 1502 edition of the complete

⁸² These ideas about reform are expressed clearly by Jakob Wimpfeling in his *Adolescentia* (1500) and *Germania* (1501). See Brady; Chrisman, 98–102.

⁸³ Bauer.

⁸⁴ Murner, 1512, sig. p2^r: "Do sy in iren iungen tagen // Leren solten semlich fragen // Latyn"; "sie gangen buobelieren // Den maegden vor dem Huß hofieren."

⁸⁵ Brant, 1509.

⁸⁶ Murner, 1519, sig. a2^r: "So vnuerstendig bliben // Das kaum den glerten ist bekant."

⁸⁷ Hutten.

⁸⁸ Brant, 1494, sig. a2^v: "narren spiegel," "villicht die nit künd lesen," "Der siecht im molen wol syn wesen."

works of Virgil, which he produced in collaboration with Johann Grüninger. It was illustrated with over two hundred high-quality woodcuts that provided a consistent visual narrative alongside the text. In the preface, Brant presents a veritable apologia of book illustration, stating that the images could help non-learned readers (*indocti*) to follow the story, and also serve as visual aide-mémoire in the tradition of the *ars memorativa*.⁸⁹ This readership of *indocti* or *illiterati* did not refer to those unable to read at all, but to the moderately educated middling sort whose classical learning had grown rusty since their Latin school days.⁹⁰ Brant's defense of printed images and their didactic function reads like a clear endorsement of the half-learned reader who needed them.

While fashionable striped clothes were increasingly spreading across the German lands, to the humanist elite of the Upper Rhine they were symptomatic of blasphemous vanity and of the troubling ambition of mercenaries, craftsmen, peasants, and other middling folk to rise above their proper place in society. Seen as both a genuine outward expression of moral corruption and a crafty disguise for the socially ambitious, stripes encompassed the central themes of social satire: the blurring of boundaries within the social order, and between appearance and reality. When it came to the striped layman's bid for access to knowledge, these learned anxieties were at their most acute, but also at their most ambivalent. Brant and his circle promoted educational reform at the institutional level and in vernacular publications addressed to the layman, or at least to semi-Latinate readers who could use the help of didactic illustrations. At the same time, they were wary of the striped layman's intellectual ambitions, especially his "sharp questions" about matters of theology.

This was of course a much-debated issue in the early decades of the sixteenth century. Within the developments that would eventually lead to spiritual reform and Reformation, the striped layman made more definite claims to spiritual and secular knowledge. Luther explicitly addressed an audience of precisely this kind: the layman without formal theological education but with some knowledge of the Bible, who seeks salvation through his own study of scripture, without the church as an intermediary. In Reformation pamphlets appearing in the southern German lands and the Swiss confederation, the striped layman—whether self-identifying as such or thus labeled by others—emerged as a central figure in debates about lay education and authority over spiritual knowledge, culminating in the 1522 pamphlet *Der gestryfft Schwitzer Baur*, in which the "striped Swiss peasant" of the title holds his own in a theological discussion with a monk.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Halporn; Zimmermann-Homeyer, 230–34.

⁹⁰ Sack.

⁹¹ For a detailed study, see Schmid Blumer.

The trope of the striped layman, all the more powerful for functioning in both verbal and pictorial form, fell on fertile soil in Strasbourg's thriving printing houses. The Grüninger press, known for its lavishly illustrated volumes, made particularly extensive use of the striped motif, in Brunschwig's books and beyond. The following section brings these images into conversation with local humanist discourse about the striped layman to provide the necessary background against which to read the Brunschwig images.

“CLOTHES REVEAL MUCH”: STRIPES IN THE VISUAL ARCHIVE OF THE GRÜNINGER PRESS

To read a group of printed images in a meaningful way, it is not enough to look at them in isolation. Woodblocks for book illustrations were commonly reused and recombined, raising questions about the relationship between an image and the work or text passage in which it appears. In many of Grüninger's books, images are used to elucidate a text passage, help readers navigate the work, or even substitute for their incomplete literacy, as in Brant's Virgil edition.⁹² There are also many instances, however, where the image is more loosely connected to the text, since Grüninger often repeats images within the same work and recycles woodblocks from older projects.⁹³ Brunschwig's works are themselves a case in point. While images of medicinal plants and apparatus are carefully integrated with the text, the same cannot be said of images showing patients and practitioners.⁹⁴ In the *Cirurgia*, for example, a dozen modular blocks are combined in pairs to create composite images. Each of the four trios of practitioners can be combined with any of the five different patients, creating a slightly different scene each time (fig. 11). Even within the same image, different removable wooden plugs are inserted into the woodblock to depict the same patient, sometimes with a wound to the face or the foot, and sometimes without any external signs of damage (fig. 12). One cannot, therefore, assume a close connection between a woodcut and the surrounding text, or even the work in which it appears.

Neither, however, should it be assumed that there was no such connection or that images were chosen at random. I aim to show that a broad overview of Grüninger's vast output allows us to recover his pictorial program by establishing a social typology of dress. This amounts to reconstructing Grüninger's

⁹² Chrisman, 105–06. On Brunschwig's claims about the function of images for those who cannot read, see Arber, 201.

⁹³ On Grüninger's woodcuts, see Dupeux, Lévy, and Wirth.

⁹⁴ On the woodcut illustrations of plants and apparatus, see Taape; Baumann and Baumann, 223–39.

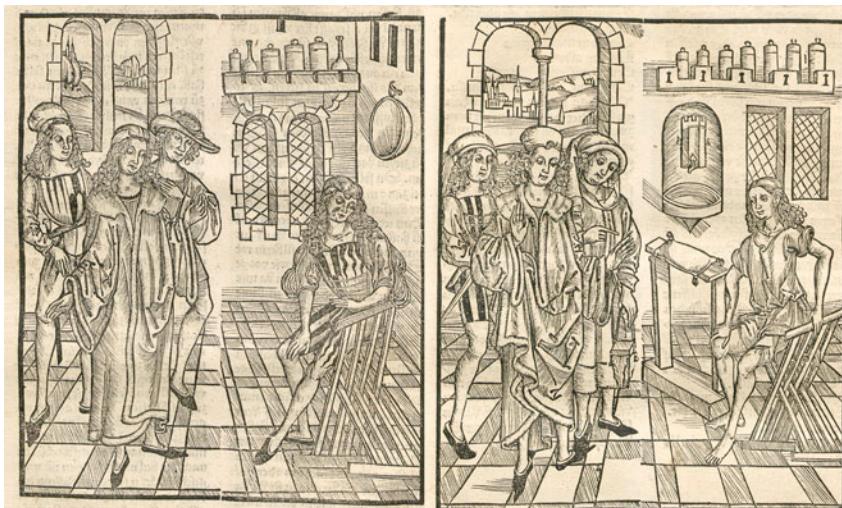


Figure 11. Woodcuts with interchangeable halves showing patients and practitioners. Brunschwig, *Cirurgia* (1494), fols. 20^v, 27^r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Inc.c.a 3452.

visual archive—that is to say, the repository of woodblocks at the press's disposal—to establish patterns in the ways he uses the figure of the striped in different contexts. As a starting point, I have used the catalogue of Grüninger woodcuts compiled by Cécile Dupeux et al.⁹⁵ This work unfortunately ignores incunables printed before 1501, and for these, I am relying on my own survey of the most prominent illustrated Grüninger volumes, many of which are now available in digitized form.

It is a testament to Grüninger's acumen in organizing craftsmen and block-cutters that he was able to produce his own edition, with new woodcuts, of Brant's *Ship of Fools* in 1494, the same year the original was printed in Basel. He pulled off the same feat in 1498 with Brant's *Varia Carmina* (Diverse poems), causing Brant to add, in a subsequent edition of the work, an injunction not to buy any books that do not bear the name of his original Basel publisher. Clearly, neither of Grüninger's editions had been authorized by Brant, but such acts of what would now be regarded as plagiarism were common, and do not seem to have gotten in the way of a fruitful collaboration between the two men after Brant's return to his native Strasbourg in 1501.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Dupeux, Lévy, and Wirth.

⁹⁶ Halporn, 35–36.

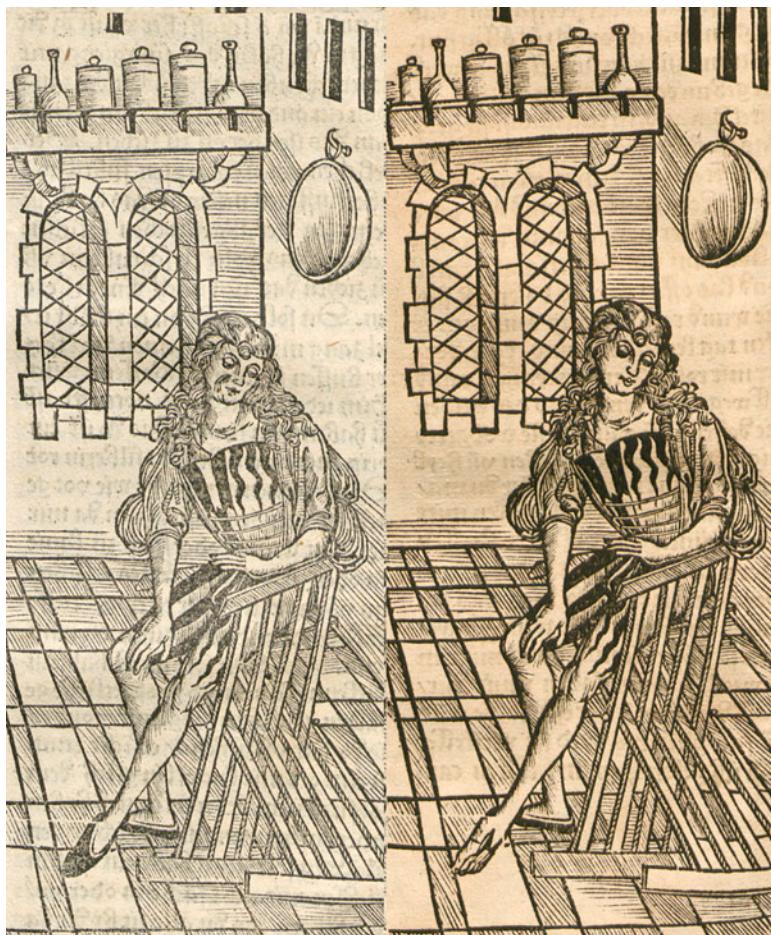


Figure 12. Images printed with the same woodblock using different interchangeable plugs. Note the wound in the foot on the right compared to the shoe on the left. Brunschwig, *Cirurgia* (1494), fols. 20^v, 86^v. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Inc.c.a 3452.

Already in his version of the *Ship of Fools*, Grüninger's images appear attuned to the significance of stripes. The fairly subtle striped hem of the vain fool in the original is carefully copied (fig. 13; cf. fig. 9). Intriguingly, Grüninger's title-page illustration places the figure of a man dressed in broad stripes center stage, suggesting that Brant's carnivalesque inversion of the social order coalesces around this striped fool (fig. 14). In the image illustrating a chapter on "stroking the dun stallion"—a metaphor for seeking advancement by flattering one's social betters—the offending fool is shown wearing conspicuous stripes, thus visually underlining Brant's association of social upstarts with



Figure 13. The vain fool in Johann Grüninger's 1494 edition of the *Narrenschiff*. Sebastian Brant, *Das nüv schiff von Narragonia* (Strasbourg, 1494), sig. a8^r. Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg i. Br., Historische Sammlungen, Ink. E 4679.

fashionable slashed and striped garments (fig. 15). The connotation of stripes as false pretence is similarly highlighted in an image showing a fraudulent alchemist sporting an elaborate zigzag pattern of black and white (fig. 16).

Stripes next make an appearance in Grüninger's 1496 edition of the comedies of the Roman playwright Terence (second century BCE). Each play is introduced by a so-called *argumentum* image.⁹⁷ One of the publisher's visual innovations, these full-page illustrations show the main characters, accompanied by a short *declaratio* explaining the picture and summarizing the plot, presumably by an unknown learned advisor—a role that Brant would fulfill for Grüninger's 1503 edition of the same work. The *declaratio* suggests that readers were expected to gain insight into the characters' nature by simply looking at the image. While the characters' relationships are illustrated by connecting lines, their outer appearance is calculated to reflect their inner nature. The *declaratio* for the play *The Brothers*, for instance, states that the depiction of the title figures, Mitio and Demea, reflects the different lives they lead: "if you look at them carefully as they are depicted here, you can see this very well; faces and

⁹⁷ On the *argumentum* images in the 1496 Terence edition, see Zimmermann-Homeyer, 95–99.

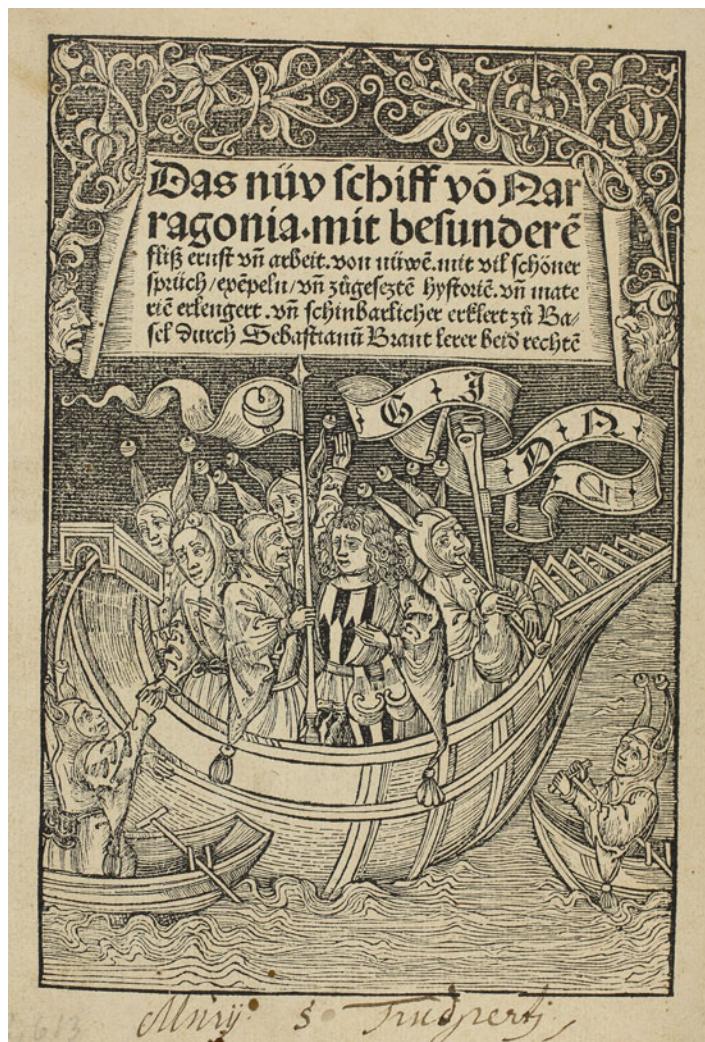


Figure 14. Title page illustration for Grüninger's edition of Brant's *Narrenschiff*. Brant, *Das nūv schiff vō Narragonia. mit besunderē* flūß erneut vñ arbeit. von nūwē. mit vñ schöner sprüch / exepelin / vñ zugesetzē hystorien. vñ mate reē erlengert. vñ schinbarlicher erklert zu Basel durch Sebastianū Brant leser berd rechtē

clothes reveal much" (fig. 17).⁹⁸ This is a clear invitation to the reader—including the historian—to read the depictions of people, and especially their clothes, as deliberate indicators of character and lifestyle.

⁹⁸ Terentius, sig. π3^v: "Hoc si recte vt hic depicti sunt eos inspicis peroptime notare potes facies, vestitus multa indicant."



Figure 15. A striped fool “stroking the dun stallion.” Brant, *Das nüv schiff von Narragonia* (Strasbourg, 1494), sig. n2^v. Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg i. Br., Historische Sammlungen, Ink. E 4679.



Figure 16. Fraudulent alchemist. Brant, *Das nüv schiff von Narragonia* (Strasbourg, 1494), sig. s1^r. Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg i. Br., Historische Sammlungen, Ink. E 4679.



Figure 17. Introductory illustration for Terence's play *The Brothers*. Publius Terentius Afer, *Comoediae* (Strasbourg, 1496), fol. 86^r. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt.

By dressing up stock figures of Greco-Roman comedy in late fifteenth-century fashion, Grüninger's Terence images allow one to map distinct social types onto the metaphor of stripes. In the bottom left corner of the same *argumentum* image, a character called Sannio appears, introduced as a *leno*, a slave merchant specializing in procuring young women. Although he was a free man,

he was excluded from citizenship.⁹⁹ His conspicuous striped attire expresses his status in terms reminiscent of humanist discourse: he is a worrisome liminal figure, somewhere between citizen and slave. His clothes also signal ostentation—they are topped with a large panache of ostrich feathers, which were not only expensive but also a symbol of masculinity in early modern European dress.¹⁰⁰ The *leno* was one of the shadiest characters in Roman comedy, and his stripes may at the same time allude to the dishonor associated with executioners, who were also in charge of prostitutes in some German cities.¹⁰¹ As the *Trouser Devil* pamphlet would later put it, “by your feathers and patchy trousers you are recognized as the reckless, knavish, and lewd human that you are.”¹⁰²

Apart from Sannio, most of the characters dressed in stripes are the major plot drivers, either the young hero or his sidekick slave. In a smaller image, from *The Mother-in-Law*, Pamphilus, the son of a propertied citizen, is wearing striped hose and shirt, as well as an ostrich feather in his cap and a dagger or sword as a sign of his status (fig. 18). Shallow, selfish, and narcissistic but genuinely infatuated, he is the typical silly young lover of Roman comedy.¹⁰³ His slave Parmeno is similarly attired but does not have a weapon, and his cap is less lavishly adorned with what may be pheasant feathers.¹⁰⁴ He is another stock character, the *servus callidus*, or clever slave, who arrogantly orders his fellow slaves around and occasionally deceives his own master, all the while priding himself in being his trusted confidant.¹⁰⁵ Grüninger’s image underscores these social pretensions, depicting Parmeno as ineptly imitating his master’s appearance. Each in their own way, these striped figures fail to display the dignity or humility appropriate to their station.

The striped as a visual mark of the young and cunningly enterprising is stable across different literary genres in Grüninger’s output, including the chivalric

⁹⁹ Packman, 195.

¹⁰⁰ Evelyn Welch, “Furs and Feathers in the Early Modern World: Moving Fashion across Global Borders,” paper given at the THINGS Seminar at CRASSH, University of Cambridge, 11 March 2015. On feathers in early modern dress, see Rublack, 2016; Ulinka Rublack and Stefan Hanß, <https://www.materializedidentities.com/feathers>.

¹⁰¹ Terence’s Sannio is influenced by the plays of Plautus; see Karakasis, esp. 215–20. On the *leno* or pimp figure in Plautine comedy, see Packman, 196. On executioners’ role in supervising prostitutes, see Stuart, 25–28.

¹⁰² Musculus, sig. D3^r: “An deinen federn / zulapten hosen / kennet man dich / was du fuer ein leichtfertiger / buebischer vnd vnzuechtiger mensch seiest.”

¹⁰³ Knorr, 307–08.

¹⁰⁴ Many thanks to Dr Stefan Hanß, University of Manchester, for his advice on head gear and feathers.

¹⁰⁵ On Parmeno as *servus callidus*, see Knorr, 301–02.



Figure 18. Pamphilus and his slave. Terentius, *Comoediae*, fol. 159^v. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt.

romance *A Lovely Read and True History of One Hug Schäpler . . . Who Became a Mighty King of France through His Great Chivalrous Manliness*, one of the press's finest illustrated volumes.¹⁰⁶ The hero of the title, Hugh Capet, is often depicted wearing striped hose, especially in his more brash and cunning exploits, which eventually saw him crowned king of the Franks in 982 CE, and in his brazen and foolhardy conquests of women's hearts and beds. In the series of woodcuts illustrating Hugh's knightly and knavish deeds, striped clothes become an emblem of the "chivalrous manliness" that the title touts as the key to his success, and especially to his sexual prowess (fig. 19). This theme is continued in another Grüninger publication, the *Book of Wisdom of the*

¹⁰⁶ Heyndörffer.



Figure 19. Hugh Capet seduces the niece of the Frisian king. Conrat Heyndörffer, *Ein liplichs lesen* (Strasbourg, 1500), fol. 6^v. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 2 Inc.c.a 3896.

Ancient Sages of 1501, a collection of fables of ancient Indian origins well known in early modern Europe.¹⁰⁷ Several of these tales of moral wisdom involve foolish adulterers and illicit lovers, who are invariably shown wearing stripes (fig. 20). From ancient Roman comedy to tales of medieval chivalry and instructive fables, virility, brash youthfulness, and upward ambitions emerge as an important set of meanings of the visual metaphor of the striped in Grüninger's works.

The illustrations in the *Book of Wisdom* also underline the association of stripes with executioners and other occupations often deemed dishonorable.

¹⁰⁷ *Buch der wyßheit der alten wisen*. On this work, often attributed to a sage named Bidpai, see also Tilley.



Figure 20. A brazen adulterer caught in the act. *Buch der wyßheit* (Strasbourg, 1501), fol. 12^r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Rar. 2143.

In a woodcut illustrating the judgment of false prophets, the repulsive task of burning them alive falls to a servant dressed in conspicuous striped patterns (fig. 21). In another story, a surgeon is flogged by a striped servant of the magistrate for allegedly cutting off his wife's nose (fig. 22). In Grüninger's *Lives of the Saints*, published in 1502, the majority of martyrs is similarly tortured, stoned, or decapitated by striped people. The Strasbourg archives do not say whether this consistent association of henchmen with stripes reflects an edict of the local authorities as described in the *Trouser Devil*, to discourage the new fashion among decent citizens. However, as noted above, it is clear that the city council was concerned about the general trend of "shameful garments" and was aware of the sensibilities surrounding the dishonor of lowly occupations: the executioner was assigned a separate place in church and was ordered not to touch any food in the market, nor to approach honorable people in public.¹⁰⁸ It is tempting to speculate that this social exclusion extended to a visual demarcation by striped clothing as shown in Grüninger's woodcuts.

¹⁰⁸ The ordinance is edited in Brucker, 398–99. See also Stuart, 28.



Figure 21. A striped executioner burning the false prophets. *Buch der wyßheit*, fol. 99^v. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Rar. 2143.

This overview of Grüninger's visual practice shows that he used the visual metaphor of the striped to mark out specific groups of people. Although the connotations of stripes vary from the daringly cunning to the disreputable, this range of meanings does not reflect an incoherent use of this visual label. In fact, considered against the backdrop of local humanist discourse, Grüninger's use of stripes as a visual trope speaks to a connected web of social meanings encompassing elite anxieties about an intellectually and socially disruptive middling sort, and artisanal anxieties about dishonor pollution. Like the striped layman, Grüninger's striped figure is socially liminal, with ambitions to rise above his allotted place in the established order.

Despite Grüninger's rampant reuse of woodcuts, it is clear that his use of stripes was deliberate, poignant social commentary. This is important when it comes to reading the illustrations in Brunschwig's works since, as noted above, the relationship between image and text is not straightforward. Brunschwig's text never comments on the images showing people practicing medicine, and there is no archival evidence about the collaboration between publisher and author regarding the images. It is clear, however, that they must have carefully coordinated text and image in the illustrated herbal section



Figure 22. Corporal punishment administered by a bailiff in striped costume. *Buch der wyßheit*, fol. 24^f. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Rar. 2143.

of the *Small Book*, and in passages on apparatus, where the images are integrated into the text column in specific places and are often immediately preceded by phrases such as “and this is its form.”¹⁰⁹ One can readily imagine that Brunschwig made precise notes as to where these images should appear in the text, or that he inspected the woodblocks Grüninger had commissioned and, like Brant, wrote on the back the passage of the text to which they belonged. Whatever their collaboration may have looked like, the insights into the visual practices of the Grüninger press outlined above allow one to read the illustrations in Brunschwig’s works in a new light, as visual commentary finely tuned to the social connotations of stripes.

BRUNSCHWIG’S STRIPED LAYMEN: SURGERY, PHARMACY, AND THE COMMON GOOD

Grüninger’s striped figures were overwhelmingly a metaphor for being in-between, neither black nor white, neither learned nor completely ignorant.

¹⁰⁹ Taape.

In light of ongoing debates about the appropriate education of the striped layman, I argue that these images represent significant visual statements: turning the much-maligned striped layman into something of an aspirational figure, they complement Brunschwig's subtle apologia for non-academic practitioners, patients, and readers of medical books.

In the woodcuts used in the *Cirurgia* of 1497, a distinct division of labor is apparent. Manual activities—stitching up wounds, letting blood, pounding ingredients—always fall to the striped practitioner. This contrast is particularly clear in the large woodcut showing an abdominal operation (fig. 1). The surgeon in tight-fitting striped clothes at the center of the scene is kneeling down to manipulate the patient's spilled entrails back into place, and has even taken off his cap. The three male figures on the left discuss and supervise the procedure through scholarly spectacles, but they are not about to get their hands dirty, much less their fur-trimmed robes. In another scene, a striped practitioner is taking on the physical task of breaking and re-setting a badly healed fracture, with a similar trio of robed men observing the procedure at a few paces' distance (fig. 23). The recurring figure with long hair and a fur-trimmed robe looks similar to Brunschwig's portrait in the dream scene (fig. 8) and may have been intended as a representation of the author, sartorially elevated to scholarly status. In any case, the venerable trio oversee the manual work of the striped man, perhaps illustrating the hierarchy of physic over surgery, or that of seasoned experts over the apprentice. At the same time, these images place the skill of the striped craftsman at the center of medical practice.

The performance of bodily tasks, which could be seen as menial, recalls the association of striped clothes with social anxieties surrounding the executioner. Indeed, many communities placed barbers, surgeons, and other body workers at the edge of honorable society, too close to the hangman's polluting dishonor.¹¹⁰ Given Grüninger's deliberate use of the striped motif, he could not have been unaware that the pictures of striped surgeons performing body work could be read as allusions to a stigma of dishonor and to the striped layman. I suggest that, rather than endorsing this stigma, Grüninger's images draw attention to it and argue against it at the same time, playing with the apparent paradox, discussed above, of stripes connoting both dishonor and social aspiration. While the stripes may at first remind a contemporary reader of surgeons' precarious status on the periphery of the hangman's shady reputation, they revert to their more positive social and epistemic meaning when read alongside the text: they become the stripes of the striped layman, who embodies Brunschwig's ideal of surgical knowledge and training.

¹¹⁰ Stuart, 29–31. See also Jütte.

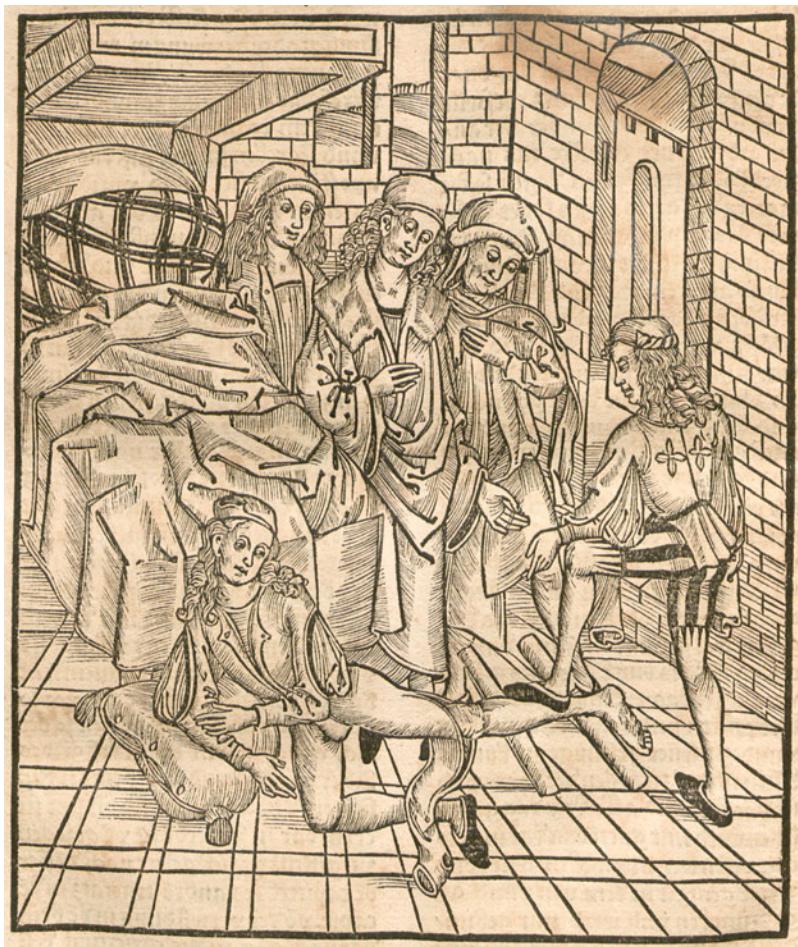


Figure 23. A surgeon re-fracturing a badly healed leg. Brunschwig, *Cirurgia* (1497). Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Inc.c.a 3452, fol. 98^v.

Images of hands-on surgical work illustrate not only what striped practitioners do but also how they gain knowledge about nature's workings, and their manipulation by technological means. As I have shown elsewhere, Brunschwig subscribed to an artisanal way of knowing, based on direct bodily interaction with broken limbs, surgical tools, and distillation apparatus.¹¹¹ The woodcuts showing surgical operations and distillers feeling the temperature of their alembic by touch (like the striped man on the bottom right of fig. 5)

¹¹¹ Taape.



Figure 24. A man wearing stripes, and students listening to a medical lecture. Brunschwig, *Liber de Arte Distillandi de Compositis* (Strasbourg, 1512), sig. B1^r. Wellcome Library, London.

showcase precisely the kind of gestural knowledge Brunschwig deems indispensable to medical practice.

Brunschwig's surgical apprentice is not only highly skilled in the requisite manual tasks. Building on a medieval tradition of learned surgery, he insists that practitioners should also have a sound theoretical understanding of the human body, including at least a basic grasp of humoral medicine.¹¹² This, too, is captured visually, in a large woodcut that recurs in all of Brunschwig's major works (fig. 24). It shows a man lecturing to a small audience—again, perhaps the author himself, graduated from surgeon's stripes to scholar's robes later in life. He has privileged access to knowledge—only he can read the weighty book angled toward him—but he is willing to share it with a range of people. While the figure nearest the lectern listens with hat in hand,

¹¹² On medieval learned surgery, see McVaugh.

the striped figure on the right strikes a different pose. He is gesticulating with his right hand as if arguing a point of his own, and his left hand is holding a rolled-up piece of paper. While he does not command large scholarly tomes, he nevertheless wields some form of written knowledge—perhaps a single recipe, a prescription, or a letter. Armed with a modicum of literacy and perhaps non-learned forms of medical writing, this striped student is able to learn from the remarks of a scholar, and even appears able to hold his own in a medical discussion with a learned expert.

This image is central to Brunschwig's works, reappearing in both distillation manuals and even making it to the title page of the *Liber Pestentialis*. In these books, too, it makes a powerful statement about laypeople's medical knowledge and Brunschwig's didactic mission, as I show below. In the *Cirurgia*, it functions as a powerful illustration of the ideal surgeon's training. Brought up in the craft tradition, he hones his manual skills through hands-on practice. But he should also acquire at least a working knowledge of learned medical theory. Like the striped layman in humanist critiques, the practitioners depicted in the *Cirurgia* are in-betweeners: at least partly literate if not Latinate, they are half learned, half artisans. In contrast to the Strasbourg humanists, whose striped layman is an impostor or arrogant upstart, Brunschwig's striped surgeon represents an ideal revived from the writings of his medieval antecedents: half learned is exactly what he should be, and the other half is not ignorance, but practical knowledge and skill.

The use of these illustrations shows not only that Grüninger understood the full rhetorical thrust of Brunschwig's programmatic defense of surgery, but also his startlingly clever use of the trope of stripes in promoting that message. Playing on the double social meaning of striped clothes, he evokes a widespread association of stripes with dishonorable body work, only to then explode that stereotype with the image of layman's stripes, signaling an expertise of two complementing halves rather than amateurish half knowledge. In so doing, the images realize the potential of Brunschwig's text to refashion the image of non-Latinate experts in an intellectual climate that was at best ambivalent and at worst hostile toward them. The figure of the striped, which emerged from humanist critiques of lay education, is used here in an entirely positive way, revaluing the layman's half learning not as a deficiency, but as one half of a valuable kind of expertise, complemented by non-rational, embodied knowledge.

In Brunschwig's distillation manuals, images of striped figures raise similar questions about the authority over knowledge and the competence to administer treatments. These volumes were not intended exclusively for trained artisan healers, but were largely addressed to the common man who might not have any medical training—that is, he might be said to be a layman with respect to

surgeons and apothecaries as well as university-trained physicians. In both image and text, Brunschwig's works make a strong case for this kind of vernacular readership, their claim to medical knowledge, and their authority over their own treatment.

While the handiwork of surgery depicted in the *Cirurgia* remains under learned supervision, in the *Small Book of Distillation* striped practitioners are shown in a more emancipated light. Although this is very much a medical work on the manufacture of remedies, the title page shows an entirely artisanal scene, and three of the depicted figures are sporting distinctive stripes: the figure on the top left decanting distilled waters, the man digging up herbs in the bottom left corner, and his colleague stoking a distillation furnace on the right (fig. 5). There are no fur-robed scholars in this busy outdoor workshop; the handiwork of distilling medicinal waters relies on the manual skills of the striped layman, helped along by Brunschwig's instructions.

Here it is worth digressing on the two women in the picture. They are involved in the pharmaceutical endeavor, collecting plants and passing them on to one of the male workers. Brunschwig's reference to "common men" as the audience is highly gendered, and indeed there is no straightforward female equivalent of the phrase: "common women" were prostitutes, not female citizens.¹¹³ Nor is there a corresponding trope of "striped laywomen." Nonetheless, women played an important role in medieval and early modern distillation practices. In addition to household pharmaceutical practices, female *weinbrennerinnen* (wine distillers) and *wasserbrennerinnen* (distillers of medicinal waters) are recorded as recognized trades in several German cities.¹¹⁴ Perhaps referring to these professionals, the title page of one of the many editions of Michael Puff von Schrick's *Book of Distilled Waters* shows a woman working a still (fig. 25). As Alisha Rankin has shown, distillation became central to the pharmaceutical practice of noblewomen.¹¹⁵ Brunschwig was aware of female practitioners of distillation and acknowledged his debt to "many learned and lay men and women," mentioning the distillation practices of local nuns.¹¹⁶ While the role of women in the intended audience of lay practitioners is not addressed explicitly, they were part of the picture, and their experience was valued.

¹¹³ Roper.

¹¹⁴ On wine distillers, see Arntz, 16–35. On women as professional distillers of medicinal waters, see Forbes, 91.

¹¹⁵ Rankin, 2008, 116; Rankin, 2013, 101–08.

¹¹⁶ Brunschwig and Ficino, 1509, fol. 2^v: "von manchen gelerten vnnd leyen man vnnd frowen"; Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 56^v.



Figure 25. Title-page illustration from Michael Puff von Schrick, *Von allen gebranten wassern* (Ulm, 1498). Wellcome Collection, London (CC BY 4.0).

The more emancipated role of laymen—and women—in pharmacy reflects the fact that surgery was much more precarious than distillation. To be sure, preparing and administering remedies had its own dangers, and Brunschwig points out the risk of further unhinging an already disturbed humoral balance. As I have shown elsewhere, however, Brunschwig makes a case for distilled waters as particularly reliable cures, even in the hands of common folk.¹¹⁷ Internal medicine was traditionally restricted to learned physicians, who generally took a disparaging view of any dabbling “quacks” or “empirics.”¹¹⁸ Clearly aware that giving advice for medical self-help could be seen as stepping on his

¹¹⁷ Taape.

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., Pelling, 136–88; Stolberg.

learned colleagues' toes, Brunschwig defers to the authority of "the honorable and highly learned doctors of the free arts of medicine, whose humble servant I am at all times, and whose advice one should duly heed, if they are available."¹¹⁹ At the same time as acknowledging learned authority, Brunschwig also implies that physicians might not always be at hand. As noted above, he repeatedly addresses his books specifically to laypeople living in villages and castles, and argues that self-help is sometimes necessary; if people live in remote parts of the empire where learned help is not available, better that they should have some understanding of medical care than perish for want of some basic remedies. At a time when traveling could be dangerous and prohibitively expensive or time-consuming, this was a compelling argument.

In the case of plague, Brunschwig suggests that even urban citizens might be left to their own devices. Recounting an epidemic he claimed to have witnessed in an unnamed town in 1473, Brunschwig writes that he had "read and also seen two or three times that the most famous doctors of this town flee in such circumstances."¹²⁰ Although he hastens to add that "our doctors nowadays would not do this," his account of the plague evokes a state of urban crisis in which the civic order is suspended and learned guidance withdrawn.¹²¹ Accordingly, Brunschwig's plague treatise affords its striped audience of practitioners and sufferers some degree of autonomy from learned doctors. Surgeons are instructed in common ways of letting blood in cases of plague, and the accompanying woodcut, which was later used in Fries's *Mirror*, shows a striped figure performing this treatment on a patient—in contrast to the *Cirurgia*, without the supervision of a physician (fig. 3). For the common citizen, Brunschwig suggests such generic remedies as a pomander that is "neither too hot nor too cold, but can be used at all times."¹²² Householders—depicted in striped hose—could protect their home by lighting fires to purify the air (fig. 4). While the medical authority of physicians is not dismissed, the images of striped people, reflecting the target audience of surgeons and common citizens, suggest a remarkable degree of medical self-sufficiency in times of plague.

In his advocacy of medical instructions for the layman, Brunschwig also appeals to a notion already inherent in the term *common man*: a sense of

¹¹⁹ Brunschwig, 1500b, sig. A2^v: "die wirdigen vnd hochgelernten doctores in den fryen künsten der arzeny deren diener vnn vnderthenig ich all zit bin / deren rath man billich pflegen soll ob man die haben mag."

¹²⁰ Brunschwig, 1500b, sigs. A2^v–A3^r: "gelesen vnd ouch gesehen hab zu .ii. oder .iii. malen die aller berümpitesten ertzte diser statt in sollichem fall wichen vnn geflohen sint."

¹²¹ Brunschwig, 1500b, sig. A3^r: "zuo diser zit vnser doctores dz mit nichten thuond."

¹²² Brunschwig, 1500b, sig. D3^r: "die weder zuo vil kalt noch zuo vil heiß sind sunder man sie alzyt bruchen mag."

community and the common good.¹²³ In the *Liber Pestentialis* he promises free medicines for fellow citizens who cannot afford them, and dedicates the book itself to the “gracious dear gentlemen of the imperial city of Strasbourg,” who asked him “to write something about it [the plague] for them and the entire community.”¹²⁴ In his surgical and pharmaceutical books, too, Brunschwig’s describes his medical practices as a boon for the urban community, claiming that “healing is nobler than other arts” because it preserves craftsmen’s bodies, and thus their “art and livelihood.”¹²⁵ While his charitable impulse extended to the common man in general, Brunschwig dedicated his work to the city of Strasbourg, “to the pleasure of all her citizens and inhabitants, including the entire community.”¹²⁶ He sums up his motivation for writing his books in a quotation from Plato: “blessed are they who further the common good.”¹²⁷

As part of his service to the community, Brunschwig speaks not only to practitioners in times of need but also to common people as patients. They, too, benefit from the expertise signaled by the layman’s stripes through a better understanding of medical practice and the practitioners they might consider consulting. Two editions of his distillation books provide primers on the Latinate jargon of doctors’ prescriptions, including the shorthand used for various weight units and preparation techniques.¹²⁸ Brunschwig confidently claims that this will allow readers to understand and judge their practitioners’ prescriptions: “if a doctor writes or prescribes something for you [to take] to the pharmacy shop, you may understand whether that which he has written for you is good or bad.”¹²⁹ This somewhat surprising subversion of the physicians’ learned authority continues in Brunschwig’s advice on choosing a healer. While he encourages his readers to seek out a learned opinion, not all practitioners are created equal. “If you can get a doctor,” Brunschwig writes, “I will reveal

¹²³ On the relationship between the common man and the community as a legitimating entity in authority conflicts, see Roper.

¹²⁴ Brunschwig, 1500b, sig. A2^r: “mynen genedigen lieben herren der keiserlichen statt Straßburg”; Brunschwig, 1500b, sig. A3^r: “in vnn der gantzen commun etwas darvon zuo schriben.”

¹²⁵ Brunschwig and Ficino, 1509, fol. 36^v: “das artzney edler sei wan alle andere künst”; “sein kunst vnn sein leben.”

¹²⁶ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 3^r: “zuo wolgefallen allen iren burgern vnd ynwonenenden / mit sampt der gantzen commun.”

¹²⁷ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 2^v: “Selig seint die menschen / welch den gemeinen nutz fürderen.”

¹²⁸ Brunschwig and Ficino, 1509, sig. EE6^r; Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 105^r.

¹²⁹ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 3^v: “Ob dir eincher Doctor schrib oder ordinieret in die Apoteck / du wol verston moechtest / ob er dir wol oder vbel geschriben het.”

and explain to you which one to choose and which others to avoid.”¹³⁰ His advice is straightforward: one should always look for what he terms a *practicus*, that is to say, one who has acquired the skill required to make remedies or treat wounds by practicing precisely the kind of manual work illustrated in the wood-cuts adorning his surgical and pharmaceutical books. A *practicus* has “experienced [*erfahren*] and learned to recognize disease,” whereas “a highly learned but inexperienced [*unerfarnen*] doctor . . . is to be avoided at all times” since he lacks practice in diagnosis and treatment.¹³¹ Book learning was well and good if you could get it, but practical experience was indispensable.

The ideal practitioner’s expertise is couched in a language of experience, or *erfarung*, familiar from humanist discourse about lay knowledge—a language that permeates Brunschwig’s works, which were, in his own words, informed by “my experience [*erfarend*] and that of others.”¹³² This collected experience, he claimed, could see his readers through if no experienced *practicus* was available: “if they can have neither healer nor medicine, much help is to be had through the *experimenta* and experience [*erfarung*] which are proven through the effect of the waters.”¹³³ While the humanists denigrated the layman’s way of knowing through experience, Brunschwig underscored its central place in his own expertise, and he was confident that it could contribute to his readers’ medical self-sufficiency.

Brunschwig’s argument about the medical agency of his prospective readers is reinforced by Grüninger’s images. Writing in the vernacular, Brunschwig breaks down Latinate pharmaceutical jargon so that his striped readers may assess their practitioners, and urges them to look for experience over learning. He reminds his readers that they have the power of choice when shopping around for medical help. As well as making more informed clients and patients of his readers, he provides the common man with the experiential knowledge to cure themselves and others independently of learned experts. For Brunschwig, the striped layman—as a reader, a patient, and a practitioner—was an important player in the marketplace of medical print and medical practice.

As a coda to this story about the beginnings of medical lay education in print, I return to the *Mirror of Medicine* by Lorenz Fries, whose use of the phrase

¹³⁰ Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 56^v: “ob du ein artzet haben magst / wil ich dir offnen sagen vnn ercleren / welcher zuo erwellen vnn die andern zuo vermeiden seint.”

¹³¹ Brunschwig, 1512, sig. K1^r: “dz er erfahren vnn gelert hatt die kranckheit zu erkennen,” “ein wolgerelter vnerfahrener artzet . . . alle zeit zu vermeiden ist.”

¹³² Brunschwig, 1512, fol. 3^r: “mein und ander erfarend.”

¹³³ Brunschwig, 1500a, fol. 15^v: “ob sie aber keinen artzet noch artzney haben moechten etliche hülff zuo bewisen durch die experiment und erfahrung die bewert sint durch würckung der wasser.”

“striped layman” proved key to my reading of the images in Brunschwig’s works. Fries’s didactic mission and intended readership are very similar to Brunschwig’s, although they are articulated more explicitly. Fries was aware of Brunschwig’s works, and even made a thinly veiled comment on their intended audience. Discussing the merits of apothecaries and other “empirics”—that is to say, practitioners whose expertise comes from experience rather than rational learning—he singles out “one to whose house the poor come running when they go to buy fish, shouting ‘dear sir, you help all people, help us, too. We are in the villages and castles, but nowhere else can we find as much fish to buy as near your house.’ Thus he has made two nice books for them, in which you will find much pretty instruction.”¹³⁴ Brunschwig’s name is not mentioned, but he is almost certainly the apothecary living near the fish market whose very own words from the dream scene in the “Thesaurus Pauperum” are quoted here.¹³⁵ Fries clearly mocks the origin story of poor supplicants from faraway rural parts who nonetheless manage to crowd into Brunschwig’s urban home on their way to buy fish. Nonetheless, he is remarkably sympathetic in his assessment of Brunschwig, who, according to Fries, “essentially understands the teachings and Latin, has done enough, as much as he knew of this art of medicine, has practiced well, and essentially excelled.”¹³⁶ Coming from a writer not known for mincing words in his criticism of other practitioners, whom he unabashedly calls “spider-munchers” and “hangman’s bastards,” this somewhat gruff endorsement of Brunschwig’s not-quite-learned expertise practically amounts to a glowing reference.¹³⁷ In fact, Fries echoes Brunschwig’s emphasis on lay or “empiric” knowledge as part of medical expertise. His own book, he writes, is informed “partly from the teaching of the famous ancient masters, and partly through my own labor and work, with many nice experienced [erfahren] and proven pieces.”¹³⁸

Indeed, one can easily read Fries’s overall thrust as a continuation of Brunschwig’s project of providing the layman with knowledge previously

¹³⁴ Fries, 1518, fol. 14^r: “einer dem die armen lüt für sein hauß lauffen wenn sie wollen fisch kauffen schryend / Ach lieber du hilffest allen menschen hilff vns auch / wir seind in den dörffern vnn schlössern / findent nit so vil fisch zuo kauffen als bei denem hauß Des halb er inen zwei schoener bücher gemacht hat / darin du findest vil hüpscher ler.”

¹³⁵ Bachoffner, 270; Wieger, 13.

¹³⁶ Fries, 1518, fol. 14^r: “wie wol er im grund der ler vnn das latin verstanden / het wol gnuogge gethon / sovil er diser kunst von der artzney gewüst / hat sich wol geübt / aber im grund obgeschwebt.”

¹³⁷ Fries, 1518, fol. 13^v: “spinnenfresser verlauffen henckerßbuoben.”

¹³⁸ Fries, 1518, fol. 9^r: “eins teils vß ler der alten berumpten meister / anders teils durch eigne müe vnn arbeit mit vil schönen erfarnen vnd bewerten stucken.”

restricted to the learned. Fries's fictitious student interlocutor is curious about learned concepts: "dear master, you speak of complexions, but not in the way I have heard our priest talk about it; also, I am something of a striped layman, and I have read that there were only four of them."¹³⁹ Explicitly self-identifying as a striped layman, this imagined reader shows some familiarity with medical terms through religious sermons and through his own limited reading. Fries has no scruples about introducing his readers to the finer distinctions of different composite complexions. In fact, he specifically caters to their limited prior knowledge, noting that "laypeople need more explanation than the learned."¹⁴⁰

Much like the layman's forays into scripture, Fries's efforts drew the criticism of learned men. In later editions of the *Mirror*, he reports that he has been heavily berated by his fellow physicians for divulging learned medicine in the vernacular. In the preface to the 1532 edition, he reckons with his learned colleagues for monopolizing useful knowledge instead of using it for the common good, and proposes to "treat them less gently than Martin Luther did the Pope."¹⁴¹ Faced with physicians' greed and arrogance, Fries suggests, the striped layman is well within his rights to cross the boundary of learned medicine for his own benefit.¹⁴² Although he remained Catholic, Fries was clearly sympathetic to Protestant rhetoric regarding the church's monopoly on spiritual salvation, but also to more widespread criticism of the learned expert who jealously guards his books and knowledge from common folk—a figure that goes back at least to the "book fool" in Brant's *Ship of Fools*.¹⁴³ As the self-styled Luther of medicine, Fries epitomizes Brunschwig's project of educating the striped layman through the medium of vernacular print to turn him into a more informed customer and performer of healthcare.

CONCLUSION

Brunschwig's illustrated works allow us to triangulate among humanist social critique, the local visual culture of print, and the common man as a reader of vernacular medicine. As I have shown, much is to be gained from a comparative

¹³⁹ Fries, 1518, fol. 20^v: "Lieber meister du sagst mir von den complexionen / aber nit wie ich wol daruon hab gehoert sagen vnsern pfarrer / auch bin ich ein wenig ein gestreiffter ley hab dauen gelesen / dz nur vier seien."

¹⁴⁰ Fries, 1518, fol. 21^r: "den gestreifften leyen muoß man mer vßlegung machen dann den gelerten."

¹⁴¹ Fries, 1532, sig. A2^v: "yr minder schonen / dann Martinus Luther des Bapsts."

¹⁴² On Fries's stance on divulging medicine to the layman, see Schmid Blumer, 178–81, 250–55.

¹⁴³ On late medieval criticism of learned expertise, especially as opposed to practical experiential knowledge, see Kintzinger. On the "book fool," see Metz.

reading of printed images that appear purely decorative as a layer of commentary on society and the role of print in the politics of knowledge. The increasing availability of digital scans of early printed works and image search functions facilitate the synoptic perspective, careful comparison, and contextualization necessary for a meaningful analysis of images whose relationship with the text is not always straightforward. My reconstruction of Grüninger's store of woodblocks—his visual archive—reveals a deliberate use of clothes as social and intellectual signifiers, as well as a rich and intricate story about the attitudes toward the middling sort and its ambitions.

Their eloquence as sources suggests that other such neglected visual material of the early print tradition might harbor similar historical treasure troves. While Grüninger is particularly conspicuous for his lavish—and, as it turns out, deliberately political—use of printed images, he was surely not the only one. The Weyssenhorn press in Augsburg, for instance, published an edition of Brunschwig's *Cirurgia* in 1534, complete with new woodcuts. Although the clothes are depicted in the by then more fashionable *Trouser Devil* style of puffed sleeves and hose with striped slashes, the social typology of dress is carefully maintained: it still falls to the striped *practicus* to re-set bones and suture wounds (fig. 26). Incidentally, while Musculus's *Trouser Devil* shows that the striped fashion and its negative moral connotations spread to the northeast of the empire, it remains for future studies to determine whether or how far the trope of the striped layman radiated beyond Strasbourg and the Upper Rhine, and how the meaning of stripes changed over time.

Reading Grüninger's illustrations of striped figures alongside Brunschwig's discussions of the common man as his intended audience has afforded a fresh perspective on the intriguing figure of the striped layman. A divisive figure from the start, he drew the ire of secular authorities and the clergy for his pretensions to luxury consumption and soteriological expertise, whereas the Reformation saw in him the model of a self-motivated and responsible reader and believer. Brunschwig's books add an as yet overlooked facet to this striped identity: the striped layman as reader, practitioner, and consumer of medicine. He was literate in the vernacular if not in Latin, and familiar with certain kinds of medical writing. He was curious, eager to learn, and perfectly capable of receiving instruction from vernacular books, from which he could even gain a working knowledge of learned medical concepts. Far from seeing him as a transgressive threat to learned authority as the local humanists did, Brunschwig conceived of the striped layman as a model reader, embodying a new kind of vernacular, artisanal expertise in medicine.

The stripes of the surgeon in the *Cirurgia* evoke the executioner's polluting touch, but also cleverly undermine that stereotype by illustrating his striped education: half learned, half guild-trained artisan. This makes him not a half-



Figure 26. A surgeon re-fracturing a badly healed leg. Note that the practitioner re-setting the fractured leg is shown in striped dress, as in the original woodcut (see figure 24). Brunschwig, *Cirurgia* (Augsburg: Weyssenhor, 1543), fol. 99v. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Res/4 Chir. 38.

wit, but an ideal practitioner in the mold of the great medieval surgeons. While the striped surgeon's manual skill ultimately remains under the supervision of learned physicians, in Brunschwig's subsequent books the striped layman maps onto the more emancipated medical practice of the common man—as an amateur distiller, household practitioner, or informed patient, whose medical concerns were “common” also in the sense of being invested in the community. Most importantly, Brunschwig saw him as a reader of vernacular medical books,

and thus anticipated what was to become an increasingly significant readership over the course of the sixteenth century.

Written amid local humanist anxieties about lay education and artisanal anxieties about the dishonor of surgery, executions, and other body work, Brunschwig's mission to provide common medicine for the common man was a highly political use of printed text and image. While showing due deference to high medicine, Brunschwig's works argue that many people do not have access to it, and so provide common medicine instead. Besides much practical advice, Brunschwig hands to the common man the key to understanding learned concepts and jargon. Controversially, the layman is thus enabled to assess and judge the services of better-educated experts, as well as seeking health independently of their authority. While these bold claims remain implicit in Brunschwig's text, the images in his works show the emancipated medical role of the striped layman quite clearly. It takes the independently minded *Mirror of Medicine* of the physician Fries to cast the striped layman's claims to medical knowledge into the explicit rhetoric of Protestant-leaning educational reform.

Images and words depicting the readers of the nascent vernacular print tradition show that ideas about lay education did not exclusively grow out of theological and spiritual concerns. While these were the most controversial issues in the debates that gave rise to reform and, eventually, Reformation, larger questions about the politics of knowledge were at stake. While the Strasbourg humanists criticized the layman's arrogation of scriptural authority, Brant and Murner apparently felt no compunction about publishing layman's mirrors on legal matters. Medicine, partly a learned discipline like law and theology, and partly a practical pursuit, played a distinct part in these debates. It did not arouse the same controversy as the common man's bid for authority over the salvation of his soul, but his claims to agency over his own body nonetheless met with learned resistance. Marking the beginning of an important vernacular tradition, Brunschwig's works depict the layman's striped agency in medicine. While most learned commentators on the striped layman merely point out that he is but half educated, Brunschwig provides an unprecedented account of the other half of medical expertise—the stripe of the contrasting color, as it were. For Brunschwig, the half learning of the striped layman was not streaked with ignorance, but with manual skill and experience, acquired through artisanal training or through printed books like his own.

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