

# Antique-Work and Naked Boys: Animating the Tudor–Stuart Grotesque

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Visual examples of the Tudor and Stuart grotesque (properly called ‘antique-work’) regularly feature a motif known as the ‘naked boy’. Much English Renaissance antique-work remains as yet unsurveyed in scholarship and the naked boy has attracted very little attention. This article maps the Tudor–Stuart interrelationship of antique-work and naked boys, with particular focus upon the relevant work by Hans Holbein, Franz Cleyn, and Inigo Jones. The naked boy plays with imitative civility or Bacchic revelry in a reorganized cosmos of the grotesque. He signifies a wide range of early modern concerns, from humanist wit to artistic invention, philosophical scepticism to political ideology, and Bacchic Neoplatonism to Christian meditation.

## Playing Grotesque

Although Nicole Dacos’ groundbreaking monograph on the origin and development of the Renaissance visual-art style known as *grotesco* was published in 1969, scholarly response, especially in English and in relation to English art, has been slow to get going.<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s to 1990s, David Summers, Andre Chastel, Alain Gruber, Philippa Glanville, Peter Fuhring, John Peacock, and Sasha Roberts progressed debate about the style and its significance in well-

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Nicole Dacos, *La Découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, 31 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969); Henri Zerner, *The School of Fontainebleau: Etchings and Engravings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969); S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy: 1500–1600* (1971; rev. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 74–77; N. Dacos and C. Furlan, *Giovanni da Udine (1487–1561)* (Udine, 1987); and Michael Snodin and Maurice Howard, *Ornament: A Social History Since 1450* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 18–53. I offer my thanks to the ARC for funding this project and to Andrew Lynch and the anonymous readers of this article for their helpful comments.

illustrated and intelligently argued works.<sup>2</sup> Despite these efforts, and the fact that other scholars have explored the presence of the grotesque in English literature,<sup>3</sup> a vast jungle of English visual material exemplary of the grotesque – properly ‘antique-work’ – remains to be comprehensively surveyed.

The present study hopes to contribute to discussion of the forms and meanings of the style in early English arts by offering an analytical survey focussed specifically on the presence and relevance of the *putto* in Tudor-Stuart antique-work. The *putto* or *spiritello* is perhaps the most recognisable and popular (not to mention durable) decorative motif adopted by English artists during the sixteenth-century revival of classical ornament. Known locally as the ‘antique boye’, ‘litle boye’ or ‘nakyd boye’, this motif is distinct from the medieval angel, and while frequently referred to (then and now) as ‘a Cupid’, is actually in most cases to be distinguished categorically from the god of love. Strictly speaking, the naked boy arrives from the Continent in the early sixteenth century as part of a mass migration of newly recovered, and newly fashionable, classical decorative components.<sup>4</sup> Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey are key agents in this aesthetic revolution as they invest considerable sums of money

<sup>2</sup> David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 103–43; Andre Chastel, *La Grottesque* (Paris, 1988); Alain Gruber, *Grottesques: Un style ornemental dans les arts textiles du XVIe au XIXe siecle* (Riggisberg, 1985); and Gruber, ‘Grottesques’, in *The History of the Decorative Arts, Volume 1: The Renaissance and Mannerism in Europe*, ed. Gruber (1993; trans. New York, London, Paris: Abbeville, 1994), pp. 191–273; Philippa Glanville, *Silver in Tudor and Early Stuart England: A Social History and Catalogue of the National Collection 1480–1660* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990); Peter Fuhring, ‘Renaissance Ornament Prints: The French Contribution’, in *The French Renaissance in Prints: From the Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, ed. Karen Jacobson (UCLA: Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, 1994), pp. 153–68; John Peacock, *The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones: The European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Sasha Roberts, ‘Lying Among the Classics: Ritual and Motif in Elite Elizabethan and Jacobean Beds’, in *Albion’s Classicism: The Visual Arts in Britain, 1550–1660*, ed. Lucy Gent (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 324–57.

<sup>3</sup> Frances K. Barasch, *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971); Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Arthur Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen, 1972); and Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> This is not to deny sporadic appearances of classical motifs in medieval art which arise from survivals of Greek and Roman imagery before the major recoveries from the Quattrocento onward.

in acquiring exquisite artefacts judged by continental rulers to be appropriate to princely magnificence. Antique-work is essential in such a politics of display, for it shows that one is up-to-date with the latest trends in decorative design.

This exciting new decorative vocabulary arises largely from late Quattrocento excavations of Nero's Domus Aurea and the recovery of ancient Roman frieze reliefs and sarcophagi. These discoveries reveal motifs such as: the hippocampus, satyr, and mask; Cupid, Ganymede, and the Bacchic child; the bucranium, festoon and candelabrum; unnameable hybrid creatures; painted representations of fantastical architecture (now classed according to the four Pompeian styles); and gracefully interlaced ensembles of many of these disparate components in complex chaosmoi that would quickly come to be called *grotesche*.<sup>5</sup> Naked boys inhabit this ornamental cornucopia and may therefore be found in every sixteenth-century medium receptive to decorative design: from tapestries, paintings, and silverware to title-pages, prints, and printers' devices; from plasterwork, masonry, and armoury to masques, triumphs, and all genres of literature.

The presence of naked boys in Tudor and Stuart artefacts is so prolific as to resist exhaustive summation. Their omnipresence argues their cultural importance and yet also presumably accounts (at least in part) for their failure to attract scholarly inquiry. In redressing this neglect, and attempting to reduce an aesthetic pandemic to controllable proportions, the present study assumes three limiting criteria and pursues a particular hypothesis. The limits are these: first, the figures of Cupid, Eros, and Anteros, Ganymede, the human soul, and the boy Christ – most of which are found readily in paintings, emblems, sonnets, and masques, not to mention elsewhere – are generally excluded from the study, while Bacchic themes will receive particular attention; second, this analysis shall concern itself not with the naked boy *per se*, but with the interrelationship of naked boys and antique-work in order to demonstrate how these decorative coevals impact upon one another and how their kinship expands the meaning and functionality of '*grotesco*' in early modern England; third, the study will foreground the work of three significant promoters of the naked boy in Tudor-Stuart antique-work – Hans Holbein the Younger, Franz Cleyn, and Inigo Jones – with a special emphasis on title-page ornaments, tapestries, decorative prints, and masques.

<sup>5</sup> See: Dacos, *La découverte de la Domus Aurea*; Ruth Olitsky Rubinstein, 'A Bacchic Sarcophagus in the Renaissance', in *The Classical Tradition Volume 1*, ed. Sir John Pope-Hennessy (Oxford: Alden Press, 1976), pp. 103–56; Robert Ling, *Roman Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and *Pompeii, AD 79: Treasures from the National Archaeological Museum, Naples, and the Pompeii Antiquarium, Italy* (Sydney: Australian Gallery Directors Council, 1980), pp. 59–67.

The hypothesis pursued is this: that the naked boy – excluding the aforementioned biblical, mythological and didactic characterisations which have specific values of their own – functions as a source of kinetic energy that impacts upon the ordering of the world. The visible sign of this energy lies in gesture, countenance, and action, and its dominant mode is play. Although representations of naked boys are distinguished semantically from one another by subtle modulations of sign and mode depending upon the nature of the artistic ensemble in which they participate, the kinetic energy they embody is frequently characterized by imitation. The English naked boy is, therefore, a decidedly humanist product, for as Erasmus writes: ‘Nature has implanted in the youngest child an ape-like instinct of imitation and a delight in activity. From this quality springs his first capacity for learning’.<sup>6</sup> Richard Halpern highlights how Renaissance humanism enters into a pedagogical dialogue with the innate bent of child’s play toward mimetic learning.<sup>7</sup> A similar didacticism, it shall be argued, operates in Tudor-Stuart decorative art.

Play is also, in a slightly different way, characteristic of antique-work. The borders of a grotesque design delimit a realm in which recognisable components from the real world and the world of design are recomposed in a world of fancy and impossibility, a world of organized chaos to be judged not so much by canons of graceful mimesis and narrative coherency (although proficiency in *disegno* and thematic unity are taken to enhance *grottesche*), as by abstract aesthetic principles of organisation such as symmetry, balance, antithesis, variety, elegance, and interlinked ‘continuation’ of motifs.<sup>8</sup> Also praised is the design’s power to elicit spectator responses of delight, surprise, fascination, meditation, and even horror. In a similar way, child’s play may be said to recompose imitated components of a grand, established, adult reality within a limited domain (a trivial game with its set of rules) so as to achieve pleasure and, in some subtle way, learning.

The child playing and the adult composing antique-work are emblematic of different developmental stages of the same humanist subject whose innate propensity to imitate passes from natural liberty to learned civility and then reaches out from the security of the latter to re-engage with the inwardly

<sup>6</sup> I quote Erasmus’ *De pueris instituendis* from Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Halpern, *Poetics*, pp. 28–32.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Peacham applies the term ‘continuation’ to antique-work to describe the interconnectedness of motifs, a feature that promotes the appearance of metamorphic transformation of each item into its neighbour. See his *The Art of Drawing with the Pen* (1606 facs.; Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1970), p. 36.

preserved energy of the former. Mimesis and fantasy are both relevant in each case for in child's play and antique-work reality is re-presented in vivid phantom form – present and yet deferred, dismantled like an echo and re-orchestrated in an alien chorus. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that the play of naked boys in English antique-work is characterized not merely by civilising *imitatio*, but also by its apparent polar opposite, Bacchic revelry. This dichotomy, supported by the evidence discussed below, illustrates that reality may be ordered and truth apprehended in different ways. The presence of Bacchic themes in continental and English antique-work makes good sense when one remembers that this boy-god's rites facilitate the re-perception of known realities in alien modes just as his own person is characterized by disturbing ontological transformations.<sup>9</sup>

Rational and suprarational orderings of reality are suggested when the naked boy is set to play among antique-work. His active body transfers an additional energy to a design already disposed to the illusion of motion by its sinuous lines and transformative shapes. He becomes an incarnated focal point of the idea dispersed throughout the whole design: he is a child, indeed a brainchild, inhabiting a world that stands for mental conception and a mental conception that stands for the world. Thus, he signifies play and play of mind, perception, and creativity. He enjoys a privileged incorporation in antique-work, not as an integrated hybrid nor as a merely placed object, but as a willing (and, not insignificantly, male) actor who, like the English humanists, performs self-defining acts in a landscape made of manipulable pieces of antiquity.<sup>10</sup>

### Hans Holbein

Italianate 'antique boyes' become so ubiquitous in late Tudor times that it is hard to imagine the freshness of their initial appearance as mere arms-bearers on the tomb of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York in Westminster Abbey or as supporters for the Wolsey arms over the gateway of the Hampton Court Clock Tower.<sup>11</sup> These accomplished examples by Italian artists contrast sharply with

<sup>9</sup> *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), s. v. 'Dionysus'.

<sup>10</sup> I am thinking here of Mary Thomas Crane's evocative definition of a Renaissance 'humanist' as someone who assimilates and redeploys ancient textual fragments. See her *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 3–11.

<sup>11</sup> See *Cardinal Wolsey: Church, State and Art*, ed. S. J. Gunn and P. G. Lindley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pls 56, 69.

the presumably English-made naked boys on the oriel window of Cardinal College (1526) whose disproportion and woodenness imply that local artists are only beginning to grapple with the antique style.<sup>12</sup> An early textual record (July–August 1530) of the decoration of Hampton Court Palace refers to Henry Blankston painting ‘a border of antyke with nakyd chyldern’.<sup>13</sup> The phrase testifies to the involvement of naked boys in a decorative frieze characterized by antique motifs. It is probable that ‘antyke’ has already consolidated as a shortened form of ‘antique-work’ and most likely refers to decorative ensembles not merely of abstract patterns (moresque, rinceaux, knot-work, (a)rabesque-work, forest-work), nor of simple classical motifs (such as egg-and-dart), but of symbiotic hybrids of the animate, inanimate and foliate worlds (that is, grotesque-work).

If we put aside scattered instances of word and image, the most interesting early body of work comes from Hans Holbein the Younger, whose artistry helps propel Tudor ornament out of immersion in local gothic precedents to participation in the European classical revival. Holbein’s gold- and silverware designs, title-page borders, and ornamental friezes represented in his painted portraiture deploy the grotesque style with a dexterity and originality of invention vastly superior to most examples being worked in England at the time. Naked boys feature prolifically in Holbein’s decorative parerga and consequently it is here that we may legitimately locate the solid (as opposed to sporadic) beginning of an English tradition of antique boys in frieze-work in general and antique-work in particular.

Holbein provides some of the earliest ‘English’ examples of antique boys in his title-page ornaments designed for the printer Johann Froben in 1516. Froben was at the forefront of the antique decorative revival in Basel, a revival intrinsically connected (as was Froben’s press) with early humanist publication. Two title-page borders designed by Holbein for Froben demonstrate the liberation of the naked boy from static arms-bearing and his motion toward a liveliness (already suggested in designs by Urs Graf and Ambrosius Holbein) that opens the door to a wonderfully rich English tradition. Just as Donatello was responsible for inaugurating the truly Renaissance *spiritello*, a child-

<sup>12</sup> See P. G. Lindley, ‘Playing Check-Mate with Royal Majesty? Wolsey’s Patronage of Italian Renaissance Sculpture’, in Gunn and Lindley, *Cardinal Wolsey*, pp. 261–85, (p. 283 and pl. 71).

<sup>13</sup> *The History of the King’s Works: Volume IV: 1485–1660 (Part II)*, ed. H. M. Colvin, John Summerson, Martin Biddle, J. R. Hale, and Marcus Merriman (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1982), p. 133.

protagonist of extraordinary vitality and semantic versatility,<sup>14</sup> so Holbein is to be credited with promoting the naked boy in England from secondary staidness to a primary and animate role in decorative art.

The first of Holbein's two woodcuts is a border for Froben's Latin edition of More's *Utopia* (1518), an image Simon Thurley says was designed in 1516 after an older Nuremburg model, and which we see subsequently reused for Erasmus' *Antibarbari* (Froben, 1520).<sup>15</sup> It is a relatively straightforward architectural border with ornamental side-columns flanking the pilasters and arch that define the bulk of the space. Along the plinth at the base runs a simplistic frieze of a mythic sea-battle harking back to medieval architectural ornament. However, the border would be nothing without the animating play of nine winged naked boys: four pairs of boys, respectively, sit on the side-columns' capitals, present the large hanging scroll that bears the book's title, stand guard beside it, and hold the shield displaying the printer's device. The ninth boy sits upon the central festoon, which is slung across the top of the arch between tablets saying, 'HANS' 'HOLB', and blows a trumpet. The boys lack full Italian anatomical fluidity, and perform without any true grotesque accompaniment, but they contribute enormously to the design. Their looking, holding, climbing, and gesturing inject a capriciousness into what would otherwise be static decorative architectonics.

The printer's device is a hand holding Christ's dividing sword (Matt. 10:34) which is entwined with two serpents and has a dove of peace perched on its point. Christ came with a sword, but our emulation of him is bound by the command: 'be yee therefore wise as serpents, and harmelesse as doues' (Matt. 10:16b).<sup>16</sup> This implied motto is, therefore, linked with Christ's prophecy to his apostles of their coming troubles in dealing with 'Gouernours and Kings' (Matt. 10:18). Such a device suits not only Thomas More's attempt to address Christian

<sup>14</sup> See Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). See also: Mario Pereira, 'Babies, Banquets, and Bacchanals', in *The Place of the Antique in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ingrid D. Rowland (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 47–83.

<sup>15</sup> See (respectively) Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Ralph Robinson, ed. David Harris Sacks (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 1999), pp. 61–62; Simon Thurley, *Royal Palaces of Tudor England: Architecture and Court Life 1460–1547* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pl. 119 caption; and *Collected Works of Erasmus, Volume 23, Literary and Educational Writings*, ed. Craig R. Thompson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 4.

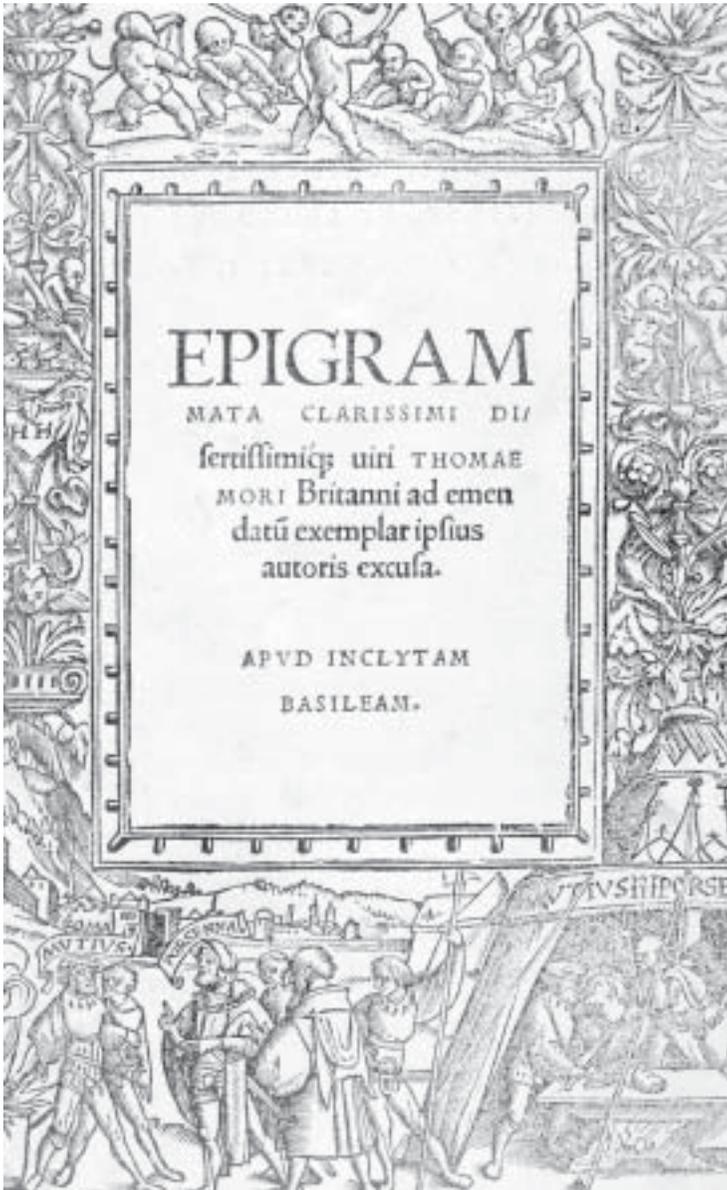
<sup>16</sup> For a version of this printer's device, used in England by W. Baldwin from at least 1549, see Ronald B. McKerrow, *Printers' and Publishers' Devices in England and Scotland 1485–1640* (London: Chiswick Press, 1913), nos. 112a–b.

mission and governance in a secular world in *Utopia* (foreshadowing his own personal predicament of allegiance to pope and king), but also links the harmless play of children to the cunning rhetorical play and *facetiae* of the humanists. The naked boys of Holbein's border-work take on great signifying power as a warning to readers of the subtly serious game being played between this book's covers.

The second Holbein design is reminiscent of something his elder brother Ambrosius might invent. It depicts two fanciful candelabra (incorporating winged naked boys, fruit, and foliage) flanking the page. Along the top, joining the candelabra from right to left, runs a frieze of eight boys vigorously involved in a celebratory procession: two blow trumpets, two strain at pulling a litter or makeshift sled on which another sits, and three accompany the litter. The scene is a single unified action or mini-*istoria*, and although its precise subject is unidentifiable it is related in genre to the mock-hunting frieze-scenes of boys found on the title-page of John Skelton's *Magnyfycence* (1532). Along the base of the page is depicted a two-part medieval narrative, also running right to left, with the city of Rome in the background. The right half features Gaius Mucius' attempted assassination of the Etruscan King Porsenna in which the Roman mistakenly stabs the king's secretary. The left half depicts Mucius, now captured, thrusting his right hand into a sacrificial fire and holding it there without flinching. Porsenna, who watches, is so impressed by Mucius' fortitude (not to mention his rhetoric) that he spares his life and the Etruscans, instead of pursuing their assault on Rome, come to peaceful terms.<sup>17</sup> This Holbein design was introduced into England by printer Richard Pynson as early as 1518 and reused in 1520 for More's *Epigrammata* and in 1521 and 1522 as the title-page of Henry VIII's *Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Martin Lutherum*.<sup>18</sup> The border is particularly well chosen in the latter case for Mucius (nicknamed Scaeuola, 'left-handed', after his exploit) had become an emblem of fortitude leading to peace. The implication is that Henry VIII can be counted on by the pope to defend the common faith with unparalleled resoluteness, as indeed the book itself demonstrates. Pope Leo X was so impressed by the book's form, content, and fealty, he granted an indulgence of ten years to any who read it, and Henry VIII became *Defensor*

<sup>17</sup> Titus Livius (Livy), *The Rise of Rome, Books 1-5*, trans. T. J. Luce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2. 12–14 (pp. 82–86).

<sup>18</sup> The latter book was Henry's response to Luther's *De captivitate Babylonica* (1520). See Thurley, *Royal Palaces*, figs. 119, 121; and *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Volume 3, Part II*, ed. Clarence H. Miller, Leicester Bradner, Charles A. Lynch, and Revilo P. Oliver (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), frontispiece.



Thomas More, *Epigrammata* (Basel: Johan Froben, 1520). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

*Fidei*.<sup>19</sup> Henry's book was thoughtfully ornamented in numerous printed editions and illuminated 'presentation' versions so as to convey the impression of princely magnificence and stalwart fealty – for this, antique-work was essential.

Holbein's two title-pages contain in prototype examples of the four fundamental modes of naked boys in Tudor art: as mundane supporters of shields; as the primary figures in (horizontal) frieze scenes unified around various themes such as the mock-hunt, pastoral child's play, the Instruments of the Passion, or Bacchanalian celebration; as semi-detachable components in (vertical) candelabra designs; and as free-ranging ornaments simultaneously presenting and playing upon the fictional architecture of the design that includes them. Over the next decade, Holbein masters the grotesque style employed in union with naked boys. By the time of Elizabeth's accession, English title-pages (and, to a lesser degree, printers' devices) offer a wide variety of naked boys embedded in border-art.<sup>20</sup>

### Royal Tapestry

While title-page ornamentation may preserve a very early cache of English naked boys and antique-work, royal tapestries are not far behind. In *Colin Clout* (1522), Skelton draws attention to the presence of naked boys in the *Petrarch's Triumphs* tapestry series owned by Cardinal Wolsey. Skelton's maniacally brilliant attack on proud prelates (and Wolsey in particular) links '[n]aked boyes strydyng' with 'wanton wenches wynkyng' (956–68) so as to argue that licentiousness goes hand-in-glove with the trappings of vainglory. Skelton's use of boys and wenches to energize an exquisitely debased image of the social elites is hardly unique,<sup>21</sup> but his identifiable visual source reveals the importance of naked boys as accessories of glory in triumph scenes and hints at the popularity of triumphs as subjects for tapestry-work.

<sup>19</sup> See Margaret Mitchell, 'Works of Art from Rome for Henry VIII: A Study of Anglo-Papal Relations as Reflected in Papal Gifts to the English King', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 34 (1971), 178–203 (pp. 181–84, 196–98).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, McKerrow, *Printers' and Publishers' Devices*, nos. 96–97, 105–06, 109, 116, 129–31.

<sup>21</sup> *The Complete Poems of John Skelton, Laureate*, ed. Philip Henderson (1959; rev. London: Dent, 1966), p. 278. Cf. Marlowe's *Edward II*, 1.1.60–70.

In 1542, Henry acquired for Whitehall a tapestry entitled *The Triumph of Bacchus* which was part of the Brussels series known as *Triumphs of the Gods*.<sup>22</sup> The work is significant because it offers a stylistic marriage of decorative antique-work and mythographic narrative in a unified scheme that is nevertheless divided horizontally into thirds. The central third is dominated by the primary *istoria* of the court of the god Bacchus. Below this runs a secondary narrative comprising satyrs and naked boys bringing grapes to press, treading them, and pouring wine. The top third of the design is given over to a grotesque fantasy enhanced with the Bacchanalian motif of poured wine as if all reality, including the god himself, has ecstatically reorganized into a dance beyond reason. The viewer's eye is led easily from the primary linear narrative (central third), down the stairs to its related parergon frieze (lower third), and thence upward via the fountain and its canopy to the outright fantastical display above (upper third). The presence of a will to ornament is undeniable in the tapestry and this impulse emulates formally the Bacchanalian celebratory trajectory from orderly worship and perception to divine madness.

The elegant and suprarational complexity of the whole may allude to the Neoplatonic idea of the nine Bacchoi who, along with the Muses drunk on 'the nectar of divine knowledge', govern the spheric order of the cosmos as they 'together celebrate their ecstatic rites around the single figure of Apollo, that is, the splendour of the invisible Sun'.<sup>23</sup> Pico della Mirandola affirms Bacchus' key role in the ascent of the Platonic initiate to become, while still on earth, 'the drinking companion of the gods', for 'Bacchus the leader of the muses, in his own mysteries, that is, in the visible signs of nature, will show the invisible things of God to us as we philosophize, and make us drunk with the abundance of the house of God'.<sup>24</sup> The tapestry proclaims, at the very least, the divine abundance of Henry's court, and more probably asserts that this learned court facilitates a Neoplatonic ascent to heavenly wisdom. Mundane realities are

<sup>22</sup> Reproduced in Thurley, *Royal Palaces*, p. 225, fig. 300. For a classic and much-copied *Triumph of Bacchus* see the engraving by Cornelis Bos and its copy by Jan Theodor de Bry in Sune Schéle, *Cornelis Bos: A Study of the Origins of the Netherlands Grotesque* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1965), pp. 126–29, pl. 18; and F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca. 1450–1700, Volume IV: Brun-Coques* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger, n.d.), p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology, Volume 1: Books I–IV*, trans. Michael J. B. Allen and John Warden (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4.1.28.

<sup>24</sup> *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, in Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One, Heptaplus*, ed. Paul J. W. Miller (1965; rev. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), pp. 13–14.

reconceived and redeployed as fashionable philosophy is married to avant-garde aesthetic form to produce a grotesque mirror of a truer reality.

In continental art, naked boys soon detach themselves from the Triumph of Bacchus genre and rise to prominence in their own subgenre of the Children's Bacchanalia,<sup>25</sup> examples of which are harder to find in England where the cult's generally debased associations hinder popular appreciation of its aesthetic progeny.<sup>26</sup> This paucity is fascinating, given not only Henry VIII's acceptance of Bacchic imagery, but the presence in Roman Britain of a Bacchus cult and numerous houses decorated in the 'Pompeian' styles complete with: fantastical simulated architecture; ornamental ensembles that we would now call *grotesche*; naked mythic youths such as Cupid and Narcissus; and Bacchic motifs and schemes.<sup>27</sup> Romano-British decorative art of course never matched the dense

<sup>25</sup> See, for example: Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto*, fig. 53 (Poussin, Infant Bacchanal); Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconography: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (1939; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pl. LXXXVIII (Michelangelo, *Children's Bacchanal*); *Italian Old Master Engraving: Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries From the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe*, Rome (Australian Gallery Directors Council, 1980), pls. 53–54 (Giulio Carpioni, *Bacchanal and Dance of Fauns and Satyrs*); W. G. Thomson, *A History of Tapestry From the Earliest Times Until the Present Day* (1906; rev. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), facing p. 232 (Giulio Romano, *Children Playing*); *Il Libro dei Disegni di Pirro Ligorio all'Archivio di Stato di Torino*, ed. Caterina Volpi (Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1994), *passim* (Pirro Ligorio); and Rubinstein, 'A Bacchic Sarcophagus in the Renaissance', *passim* (various).

<sup>26</sup> See: Plutarch, *The Philosophie, commonlie called, the Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1603), Glossary, s. v., 'Bacchanalia'. More positively, see 'Bacchus' in Thomas Cooper's *Dictionarium historicum & poeticum* which is the second part of his *Thesaurus linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1565 facs.; Menston: Scolar, 1969). It is not till the Restoration that one finds completely comfortable references to artistic Bacchanaliae: see, John Evelyn, *Sculptura: Or The History, and Art of Chalcography* (London: J. C. for G. Beedle, T. Collins and J. Crook, 1662), pp. 28, 51–52, 65, 91, 136; and John Bullord, *A Collection of Paintings...Exposed to Sale by Auction* (London, 1690), p. 1 (no. 31). The Bacchanalia is regularly employed to satirize drunkenness in early modern England. See: Philip Foulface, *Bacchus Bountie* (London: T. Orwin for Henry Kyrkham, 1593); Joseph Hall, *The Discovery of a New World in the Moon* (1609 facs.; New York: Da Capo, 1969), pp. 64–75; Richard Rawlidge, *A Monster Late Found Out* (1628); and anon., *The Copie of a Letter Sent from the Roaring Boyes in Elizium* (1641).

<sup>27</sup> See: Brian Philp et al, *The Roman House with Bacchic Murals at Dover* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989); Valerie J. Hutchinson, *Bacchus in Roman Britain: The Evidence for his Cult*, B. A. R. 151.1–2 (1986); S. A. Mackenna and Roger Ling, 'Wall Paintings from the Winchester Palace Site, Southwark', *Britannia* 22 (1991): 159–71; and Norman Davey and Roger Ling, *Wall-Painting in Roman Britain* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1982), esp. pp. 123–34.

sophistication of parent examples preserved at the heart of the empire, but we should be willing to admit that a number of classical decorative modes and motifs (including *grottesche* and naked boys) were actually arriving in England for the second time, *mutatis mutandis*, when they came via the continental Renaissance.

The scarcity of early modern English Bacchanals is more than made up for by the English love of the pastoral genre of children's playful labour which, *pace* Skelton, is generally innocent despite its kinship with and probable origin in the Triumph of Bacchus genre as indicated by the recurring grape-gathering motif.<sup>28</sup> Henry VIII's inventory refers a number of times to tapestry suites entitled *Boyes Playinge*. Item 12566 is typical: 'Fyve peces of lyke Tapestry with braunches and boyes playinge naked...'.<sup>29</sup> The tapestries were woven initially in the Low Countries (where Henry obtained most of his tapestries) before being produced locally.<sup>30</sup> W. G. Thomson suggests that the credit for the initial design of the *Boyes Playinge* series should probably go to Giulio Romano, whose design for a lively scene of winged *putti* gathering grapes and playfully wrestling animals and each other resides in the Salting Collection (Victoria and Albert Museum).<sup>31</sup> I would add that Giulio may have been inspired by an image in Francesco Colonna's Neoplatonic romance, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499),<sup>32</sup> and if this is the case, we can chart an aesthetic trajectory of the *Boyes Playinge* series in which its Neoplatonic and Bacchic values gradually soften. This results in an English series that might be read in muted Bacchic terms, but is probably more widely appreciated as expressive of varieties of pastoral delightfulness centred upon children's activities.

The popularity of the *Boyes Playinge* series ensured its convincing revival at the Mortlake tapestry manufactory during the reigns of the early Stuarts. In fact, '5 peices of hangings of the *Story of the Boys*' are itemized as late as the

<sup>28</sup> Dempsey discusses the grape-gathering motif in connection with Bacchanalian children who may be taken to represent spirits of the vine (*Inventing*, pp. 55–71).

<sup>29</sup> See *The Inventory of King Henry VIII: Society of Antiquaries MS 129 and British Library MS Harley 1419: Volume 1, The Transcript*, ed. David Starkey and Philip Ward (London: Harvey Miller, 1998). See also items 12565, 13257, 13512, 13919, 14135.

<sup>30</sup> W. G. Thomson, *Tapestry Weaving in England From the Earliest Times to the End of the XVIIIth Century* (London: Batsford, 1914), pp. 62–64. Reproductions of the *Boyes Playinge* tapestries may be found in Thomson, *Tapestry Weaving in England*, figs. 14 (Holyrood), 31 and 35 (both Broughton House); and Thomson, *A History of Tapestry*, facing p. 232 (Broughton).

<sup>31</sup> See the reproductions in Thomson, *A History of Tapestry*, pp. 196, 230–32.

<sup>32</sup> *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, 2 vols., ed. Giovanni Pozzi and Lucia A. Ciapponi (1968; rev. Padua: Antenore, 1980), 1.167.

royal inventory of 1695 made at Queen Mary's death.<sup>33</sup> The word 'Story' is significant here for it means 'history-work', a term arising from Alberti's '*istoria*' and generally signifying a large-scale artistic composition in which numerous human figures are arranged in an aesthetically and mimetically coherent narrative with all the attendant graces. Thus, the *Boyes Playinge* tapestries illustrate the rise of naked boys out of the cornucopia of antique decorative motifs and their role as privileged ornamental parerga to become the primary figures in substantive works – and yet, in the process, it would appear that much meaning has been emptied out of them.

The entertaining borders created for the Raphael-designed *Acts of the Apostles* suite show that while naked boys may succeed as a full-scale tapestry subject in themselves, their involvement in ornamental border-work still has much to offer. In the first Mortlake *Acts* series (c. 1623) the border for *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* features naked boys handling fishes and nets, and *Christ's Charge to Peter* is framed with boys bearing Instruments of the Passion.<sup>34</sup> The boys, therefore, echo in playful mode the serious themes of the *istorie* they garnish and, in so doing, form not merely a decorous frame to the work but also a bridge leading the audience into participation in the primary content. Naked boys' privileged handling of items from the biblical narrative invites the spectator's meditative handling of the subject. Childish experimentation with iconic objects stands for and assists the viewer's experimental (that is, experiential) faith. Their imitative energy directs ours, and our imitation of them on a spiritual plane facilitates our imitation of Christ, whose children we thereby become.

### Franz Cleyn

Any discussion of early modern English tapestry must include the work of Franz Cleyn, a German artist who practised in Venice, Rome, and Copenhagen before settling in London in 1625 and remaining there until his death in 1658.<sup>35</sup> He

<sup>33</sup> Thomson, *A History of Tapestry*, p. 364.

<sup>34</sup> Thomson, *Tapestry Weaving in England*, pp. 73–76, figs. 17–18.

<sup>35</sup> The best accounts of Cleyn are: David Blayney Brown in, *The Dictionary of Art: Volume 7*, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996), s. v. 'Cleyn, Francis'; and Peter Thornton and Maurice Tomlin, 'Franz Cleyn at Ham House', *National Trust Studies* (1980), 21–34. For further information, see: Maurice Tomlin, *Ham House* (1968; rpt. London: Balding and Mansell, 1982); and *Drawing in England from Hilliard to Hogarth*, ed. Lindsay Stainton and Christopher White (London: British Museum Publications, 1987), pp. 70–71.

was installed as principal designer at the Mortlake tapestry factory and his ornamental pieces (drawing inspiration from the *Acts* tapestries, and works by Van Dyck and Polidoro da Caravaggio) find expression in tapestry, paint, and print. His decorative art is extraordinarily important in the early-seventeenth-century proliferation of naked boys and grotesque-work in England. The best introduction to his enthusiasm for the topic comes with a visit to Ham House in Surrey.

Cleyn played a major role in William Murray's redecoration of a number of rooms at Ham from 1637 to 1639 and no other seventeenth-century English house shows such an abundance of naked boys. The redecoration exemplifies the contemporary courtier style dominated by the artistic (and perhaps managerial) influence of Inigo Jones, Surveyor of His Majesty's Works, under whom Cleyn had worked from as early as 1625. Cleyn possibly exercised some degree of control over the artistic unity of the rooms at Ham and is directly responsible for the ceiling and cove paintings (done in tempera on paper) in the tiny Green Closet. A number of these pictures are likely to have been cartoons for tapestries before ending up at Ham.<sup>36</sup> The Green Closet is a rare survival of a Caroline cabinet room designed to display miniatures and small paintings, and was thus richly decorated and hung to convey the impression of *multum in parvo*. Four grotesque corner panels surround the central ceiling oval of Flora and flying naked boys, and three large scenes of boys playing in landscapes decorate the coves. These large scenes of boys playing, along with similar, smaller scenes (not all by Cleyn) in inset paintings elsewhere in the house (Marble Dining Room, Withdrawing Room, North Drawing Room), derive primarily from originals by Polidoro who is known for assisting Giovanni da Udine on the Vatican Loggia grotesques. Charles I acquired the so-called *Nine Panels* of Polidoro (comprising three scenes from the story of Cupid and Psyche and six of *putti*, goats and satyrs) for Hampton Court in 1637; it was from these that the Ham House copies were made.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Peter Thornton and Maurice Tomlin, *The Furnishing and Decoration of Ham House* (London: The Furniture History Society, 1980), pp. 25–26, figs. 36, 37, 213; Tomlin, *Ham House*, figs. 14–15.

<sup>37</sup> Tomlin, *Ham House*, pp. 10, 14, 30, 34; Christopher Rowell, Cathal Moore and Nino Strachey, *Ham House, Surrey* (London: National Trust, 2002), pp. 25–27; and Thornton and Tomlin, *The Furnishing and Decoration of Ham House*, p. 47, figs. 51, 55; John Shearman, *The Early Italian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 196–200, figs. 172–79; Oliver Millar (ed.), 'Abraham van der Doort's Catalogue of the Collections of Charles I', *Walpole Society* 37 (1958–60), items 17.2, 18.6, 18.10, 19.13, 21.7, 22.10, 42.2, 42.4, 43.6; and, *The Late King's Goods*, p. 218, fig. 72.

What was formerly the Great Dining Room (now the Round or Hall Gallery) was known to hold '[t]hree fixt Landskips of Decline' in 1683. It is significant that Cleyn's inset pictures of naked boys in pastoral settings are deemed simply, 'Landskips', a word suggesting, in this instance, secondary ornament with a quotient of rural content. No mention is made of how various accessories in a number of Ham's 'landscapes' suggest their derivation from Bacchic scenes or the Cupid and Psyche myth. The North Drawing Room inventory of 1679 uses similar language to identify '[t]hree fixt Landskips, one over the Chimney & two over the doores'. Once again, the 'fixt Landskips' are boys playing in landscapes (with Bacchic motifs).<sup>38</sup>

When one considers, in addition to the imagery discussed above, the cove paintings of naked boys in the Duke's Closet; the Museum Room's 'suite of tapestry of floure pots' (a well-known series of ornamental pieces incorporating grotesque-work); and the '[s]ix peices of Crotesk hangings' in the Duke of Lauderdale's wardrobe (1683); it becomes abundantly clear that the evolving decorative agenda of Ham House from the late 1630s to the early 1680s gives great priority to decorative schemes embracing naked boys and grotesque-work.<sup>39</sup> Analysis of the specific reasons for the inclusion of individual artworks by differing owners exceeds the scope of this article, but generally speaking, one can discern the promotion of an impression of courtier opulence along lines characteristic of the work of Jones and Cleyn – and for this, antique-work and naked boys are essential.

Cleyn's fascination with antique-work and boys playing extends throughout his English career and multiple variations on similar designs recur in tapestry, paint, and print. In four different books of etchings, Cleyn effectively declares himself a master-inventor of grotesque designs that display naked boys. Furthermore, he is one of the earliest contributors to the emerging British industry of solely ornamental print publication (as distinct from title-pages and portraits).<sup>40</sup> Cleyn's five-piece suite of ornamental tapestries, entitled *Five Senses*, closely parallels – if we go by the Haddon Hall set and the lengthy description in the inventory of Cardinal Mazarin (1653) – his book of etched

<sup>38</sup> I cite, respectively, the 1683 and 1679 inventories from Thornton and Tomlin, *The Furnishing and Decoration of Ham House*, p. 126. See figs. 31, 33, 34 in the same work. For Cupid and Psyche, see Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, 4.28–6.24.

<sup>39</sup> I quote, respectively, the c. 1654 and 1683 inventories from Thornton and Tomlin, pp. 21, 169. See figs. 71 and 76 in the same work.

<sup>40</sup> See Antony Griffiths, 'The Etchings of John Evelyn', in *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Courts: Essays in Honour of Sir Oliver Millar*, ed. David Howarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 51–67 (pp. 57–59).

plates, *Quinque sensuum descriptio, in eo picturae genere quod (Grottesche) vocant Itali* (1646).<sup>41</sup> These etchings reveal that Cleyn is capable of highly sophisticated decorative designs, which he announces overtly in the title as being according to the style the Italians call ‘*Grottesche*’.

Each plate of *Quinque sensuum descriptio* shows the centrally placed emblematic figure of the sense (for example, ‘*Auditus*’ or ‘*Visus*’) surrounded by an interwoven decorative ensemble that is neither wholly static nor altogether free. The surging rinceaux sprout demi-figures, flowers, and strapwork, while winged naked boys experiment with instruments appropriate to the relevant sense (for example, bagpipes or eye-glasses), and animals appear both to live and to adorn in their characteristic postures. Cleyn shows his continental credentials in the effortlessness, the *sprezzatura*, of the poise achieved between a symmetrically balanced design and lively individual motifs. The role of the boys is crucial because their actions – governed by childlike curiosity, experimentation, and play – are synecdochic of particular sensory stimulations. They affirm the experimental nature of all human perception and draw attention to the very images in which they exist as creative responses to the sensory perception of reality. The plates reveal Cleyn’s great *invenzione*, not merely in their internal diversity and subtly varied balance, but also in their thoroughgoing decorum, for what better way is there to represent the power of the senses than to figure their specific objects as a miscellany of realities to which the human mind applies itself so as to impose a pattern of comprehensibility? Cleyn’s sceptical *grottesco* chaosmos demonstrates that mortals (as naked boys) find themselves in a reality so fantastically diverse that it is only via the windows of our senses that reason begins to make legible, linear texts of the world.

Cleyn’s *Varii zophori figuris animalium ornati* (1645) differs strikingly from his *Quinque sensuum descriptio*, despite the recurrence of some familiar figures (such as his bemused dog).<sup>42</sup> This series of nine etched, narrow friezes offers tightly compressed tangles of figures in falling-climbing vertical arrangements or surging horizontals, each with a certain degree of thematic unification (for

<sup>41</sup> Mazarin’s inventory is quoted in Thomson, *A History of Tapestry*, p. 308. Thomson is unaware of the etchings. Antony Griffiths reproduces the title-plate and the plates ‘*Auditus*’ and ‘*Visus*’, in *The Print in Stuart Britain 1603–1689* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), pp. 122–23.

<sup>42</sup> Five plates from *Varii zophori* may be found in: Griffiths, *The Stuart Print*, p. 121 (figs. 72b and 72c); Alexander Globe, *Peter Stent: London Printseller Circa 1642–1665* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), figs. 299, 302; and the University of Michigan Museum of Art webpage: [http://www.si.umich.edu/Art\\_History/demoarea/details/1963\\_2.9.html](http://www.si.umich.edu/Art_History/demoarea/details/1963_2.9.html)

example: an aquatic scene; a scene of nymphs and demi-satyr). Unlike *Quinque sensuum descriptio*, there is almost no free space, as rinceaux-entwined or wave-enveloped male and female demi-figures, satyrs, naked boys, animals and antique urns, fruit and foliage, and horses and seahorses tumble and climb amongst one another. The images, with their high degree of strenuous action, anatomical sculpturality, and emphasis on the stresses of weight-bearing, are suggestive of the Baroque and hint at a Bacchic dissolution of ontological stability.

Cleyn went on to produce the aptly named *Paedopaegnion: siue puerorum. ludentium schemata varia...Designes of Frizes, with Boyes, Beasts and Fruits, Usefull for Painters, Goldsmiths Carvers &c* (pre-1650?), etched by William Carter, and bearing a grotesque-work cartouche on the title-page flanked by naked boys.<sup>43</sup> This set of etchings and the one discussed below differ from *Quinque sensuum descriptio* and *Varii zophori* in being dominated by naked boys as fully independent subjects in themselves. The impression is that rather than naked boys inhabiting a grotesque world, we have scenes of the naked boys' world itself. As might be expected, despite the extraordinary difference in size and dimension, there is a direct relationship between some of the boys represented in *Paedopaegnion* and those found in the Mortlake *Boyes Playing* tapestry series.<sup>44</sup> Wenceslaus Hollar also etched a set entitled *Paedopaegnion: siue puerorum. ludentium schemata varia* (circa 1645) after designs by Pieter van Avont.<sup>45</sup> This series is a rare example of an explicit Children's Bacchanalia – complete with leopards and goats, juvenile satyrs and Bacchoi, celebratory music and dance – that was readily available in England. Avont may deserve credit for the initial creation of these suites of boys playing, yet Cleyn's designs, despite bearing the same title, are original and possess much fainter Bacchic residues.

Cleyn is also responsible for designing another suite, etched by Josiah English, of naked boys playing among rinceaux with symbolic accessories that may be interpreted according to varying paradigms. The pan pipes and

<sup>43</sup> Globe, *Peter Stent*, 157 ('etched before 1650'), figs. 307–08. See Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890), s. v., 'paegniarius': 'of or belonging to play. Thus the name paegniarii was given to gladiators who fought only in jest'.

<sup>44</sup> For example, the set of boys piggybacking next to the boy doing a handstand in *Paedopaegnion* (Globe, *Peter Stent*, pl. 308) recurs in reverse in one piece of the Holyrood Palace *Boyes* suite (Thomson, *Tapestry Weaving*, fig. 14).

<sup>45</sup> Richard Pennington, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Etched Work of Wenceslaus Hollar 1607–1677* (1982; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. xxx–xxxii, 77–80. A six-print copy of Hollar's rendition of Avont's *Paedopaegnion* is held by the Library of the Canadian Center for Architecture.



Franz Cleyn, 'Visus', from *Quinque sensuum descriptio, in eo picturae quod (Grotesche), vocant Itali* (London: Thomas Hinde, 1646).  
© The Trustees of the British Museum.



Franz Cleyn, 'Male and Female Satyrs and Lion', from *Varii zophori figuris animatum ornati* (London: Thomas Rowlett, 1646).  
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

shepherd's crook in one plate suggest a general pastoral theme, while the column, crown, and lion in another suggest Christian allegory, and yet Bacchic hints are never far away. This series, despite its apparent generic similarity to his *Paedopaegnion*, is entitled *Severall Borders of Grotresco Worke* (c. 1650?). If *Paedopaegnion* offers little more than (perhaps eroticized) images of naked boys playing, *Severall Borders of Grotresco Worke* offers friezes with boy protagonists unified around thematically coherent and discrete mini-*istorie*.

### Textual Definitions

Cleyn's work illustrates particularly well that naked boys are capable of dominating tapestry series, painted landscape friezes, and etched border friezes, thereby functioning as their own decorative subgenre which challenges the specificity of available English terminology. The individual pieces may be taken as representative of 'Boyes Playinge', 'Landskip', or 'Grotresco Worke', depending, in a not always predicable way, upon their aesthetic character and the nationality and personal vocabulary of the writer. Images of naked boys reach from the realms of inconsequential decorative art (an early use of 'landscape') right through to the heights of full-scale narrative composition ('story-work'). Along the way, they maintain their integrity as 'boys playing', and their kinship with antique-work. In 1655, the inventory of the earl of Arundel records: 'A male and female Satyr, with two puttini. Grottesque. Wood'.<sup>46</sup> If this refers to a painting rather than a carving, it might indicate a copy after one of Polidoro's *Nine Panels* of landscape friezes with boys and mythological figures (or something along similar lines). With this in mind, the record appears to affirm the 'landscape-boys-grotesque' taxonomic nexus in which pictures of naked boys tend to occupy the terminological overlap between grotesque and landscape, and thus to sit at the fulcrum between ornament and narrative.

Written inventories can never fully record the artefacts to which they refer. The ever-present potential for ambiguity and semantic slippage is dramatically enhanced when the object being described exemplifies grotesque-work – a variable style in which individual motifs and their specific relations, not to mention the terminology appropriate to them, are all unclear to start with. Nevertheless, an early account in the Inventory of the Royal Wardrobe (1561) is quite revealing despite its brevity: 'Item, twa paintit broddis[:] the ane of the

<sup>46</sup> See, Mary F. S. Hervey, *The Life, Correspondence and Collections of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, 'Father of Vertu in England'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), p. 497.

muses and the uthur of crotescque or conceptis'.<sup>47</sup> 'Conceptis' must signify 'conceit', which in the sixteenth century was able to mean something 'conceived in the mind', and more specifically a fancy produced via the faculty of imagination (*OED*, sb. I.1; III.7). Whether or not these two panels were actually painted as a set, it is clear that the clerk understands a stylistic opposition between the representational panel ('the muses') and the fantastical panel ('crotescque or conceptis'). The phrase, 'crotescque or conceptis', is a serendipitous remark for students of the early English grotesque because it reveals unambiguously that antique-work could be understood as a metonymy for the artistic mind at work. The grotesque assemblage is a visual trace of the very process of conception and invention understood as a mental praxis of gathering and imaginatively re-disposing prior realities in new confabulations. There may or may not have been a naked child in this panel, but either way it declares itself to be the artist's brainchild.

This is surely one of the earliest English textual indications of a higher-order understanding of antique-work. Theorists on the Continent had been vigorously debating the values and meanings of *grotesche* for a generation by then, but it is not till Henry Peacham's *The Art of Drawing With the Pen* (1606) that the first substantial theorisation of antique-work appears in England.<sup>48</sup>

Peacham writes with the late Tudor manifestation of antique-work – a full analysis of which is precluded here by limitations of space – dominating his mind. The Elizabethan decorative atmosphere is largely informed by published suites of engravings of cartouches, borders, chimneypieces, and fantastical architecture coming out of the Low Countries, by artists such as Hans Vredeman de Vries, Cornelis Bos, and Jacob Floris.<sup>49</sup> These designs, tirelessly featuring strapwork and naked boys, are reproduced copiously by English artists. It is late in Elizabeth's reign that complex literary uses of antique-work begin to appear in works such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), Sir Robert Dallington's rendition of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1592) and the anonymous play, *Doctor Dodypoll* (1600), all of which embed naked boys in antique-work and relate them thematically to love or Cupid.<sup>50</sup> Peacham lists the

<sup>47</sup> *OED*, s. v., 'Grotesque', A1a.

<sup>48</sup> *The Art of Drawing with the Pen*, pp. 35–37.

<sup>49</sup> See Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, pp. 47–88.

<sup>50</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 3.11.46–52; Sir Robert Dallington, *Hypnerotomachia: The Strife of Love in a Dreame* (1592 facs.; Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969), sigs. 39v–41r; *The Wisdome of Doctor Dodypoll*, ed. M. N. Matson (New York and London: Garland, 1980), 1.1.50–67.

appropriate aesthetic locations for the style – ‘plate, clocks, armour, all manner of compartmentes, curious Architecture, borders of maps, &c’<sup>51</sup> – and explains its characteristic form as:

an vnnaturall or vnorderly composition for delight sake, of men, beasts, birds, fishes, flowers, &c without...Rime or reason, for the greater variety you shew in your inuention, the more you please, but remembering to obserue a method or continuation of one and the same thing throughout your work without change or altering.<sup>52</sup>

Peacham’s prescriptive ekphrasis of the style, which includes ‘naked boyes riding and playing with their paper-mills or bubble-shels vpon Goates, Eagles, Dolphins &c’,<sup>53</sup> is acute and influential and seems to rely, if only in part, on his reading of Dallington’s *Hypnerotomachia* and on Northern European prints. The involvement of naked boys with goats, eagles, and dolphins evokes ancient imagery relating to Bacchic rites, Jove’s abduction of Ganymede, and Neptune’s triumphs, while boys playing with paper-mills (that is, whirligigs) calls to mind the *Boyes Playinge* tapestries.

Peacham establishes the standard English textual definition of antique-work by downplaying mythographic significances and underscoring variety so as to privilege the idea of artistic *invenzione*. He gives ‘Landt-skip’ a chapter of its own,<sup>54</sup> defining it as an ‘expressing of the land by hills, woodes, Castles...&c’, and yet also relates it to the broad class of decorative ‘*Parerga*’.<sup>55</sup> He probably would have considered Polidoro’s *Nine Panels* (and Cleyn’s copies) as ‘landscapes’, but would have had to loosen his definition of ‘antique-work’ just a little if he wanted this term to include images of boys playing in which the boys were not integrated in an all-embracing fantastical design (for example, Cleyn’s *Paedopaegnion* and *Severall Borders*). The genius of Peacham’s definitions of both ‘landscape’ and ‘antique-work’ lies in their affirmation of a core meaning (natural scenes in the Netherlandish style; the classic grotesque-work assemblage) while allowing more nebulous applications within the fluid world of border-art. Peacham’s conceptual clarity fights an uphill battle against a plethora of vague and idiosyncratic uses that are not adequately crystallized in early-seventeenth-

<sup>51</sup> *The Art of Drawing*, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> *The Art of Drawing*, pp.35-36.

<sup>53</sup> *The Art of Drawing*, p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> *The Art of Drawing*, pp. 28-31.

<sup>55</sup> *The Art of Drawing*, pp. 28-29.

century dictionaries.<sup>56</sup> The problem is that by this time ‘antique’ was being used (substantively) to refer to grotesque-work proper, various sorts of classical frieze-work, an individual hybrid creature, a fright mask, a gargoyle, a ghastly or absurd countenance or posture, atlantes and caryatids, and (adjectively) to just about any artefact styled after classical precedent. In early Stuart England, the terminology of the grotesque, despite Peacham’s insight, remained as metamorphic and undecidable as the grotesque image itself. Evidence of this terminological superfluity may be seen in Inigo Jones’ *Roman Sketchbook* where terms like ‘antike’ and ‘grotesk’ (with which he is familiar) are put aside in favour of the adjectives, ‘composed’, ‘capricious’, and ‘varied’.<sup>57</sup>

### Inigo Jones

Inigo Jones’ decorative work exceeds any brief survey, but some hint of his interest in our theme is appropriate because not since Holbein had England possessed an artist with such a brilliant combination of natural talent, humanistic learning, and continental appreciation of art theory and practice. Throughout the early Stuart period, the Crown and its courtiers employed numerous artists who were expert in the grotesque to decorate royal palaces and noble houses in the latest style. Inigo Jones was the primary figure in this elite group including Franz Cleyn, Matthew Gooderick, John de Critz, and Edward Pearce, all of whom executed grotesque-work commissions incorporating naked boys. Jones, however, exceeds the others in both his theoretical grasp of *grottesche* in his *Roman Sketchbook* (which cannot be addressed here) and his symbolic deployment of naked boys. A suggestion of the semantic possibilities resident in Jones’ naked boys may be given via three examples from his Stuart masque proscenia.

<sup>56</sup> Frances K. Barasch, *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971), notes that ‘Renaissance landscape work, based on hints from the ancients, adorned the luxurious terraces and loggias of Italy and was frequently called *grottesca* in Italian’ (p. 64).

<sup>57</sup> The terms ‘antike’ and ‘grotesk’ are found scattered among Jones’ marginal annotations in his copies of Italian art books such as Palladio’s *I quattro libri dell’architettura* (1601) and Vasari’s *Vite* (1568). The unpaginated *Roman Sketchbook* resides in the Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth House. Discussion of Jones’ theory of the grotesque and a transcription of the relevant pages from the *Sketchbook* may be found in L. E. Semler, ‘Inigo Jones, Capricious Ornament, and Plutarch’s Wise Man’, in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 66 (2003).

The proscenium description for the pastoral, *Florimène* (1635), implicitly declares that naked boys should be thematically functional and decorous:

The ornament enclosing the scene [that is, the proscenium] was made of a pastoral invention proper to the subject, with a figure sitting on each side, representing a noble shepherd and shepherdess playing on rural instruments; over them garlands held up by naked boys, as the prize of their victory.

Above all ran a large frieze, and in it children in several postures, imitating the pastoral rites and sacrifices; in the midst was placed a rich compartment in which was written FLORIMENE.<sup>58</sup>

As always, Jones is aware of the necessity for the main work and its parerga to cohere as an ensemble. The surviving drawing for the *Florimène* proscenium complements the ‘Description’ and reveals that the ‘large frieze’ of ‘children’ is Bacchal in character. Along the top, running outward from the central compartment, are two trains of naked boys with goats and flamens moving toward herms, a sacrificial altar and an arbour shrine. The side borders are occupied by a shepherd and shepherdess, each surmounted with a pair of boys with upraised garlands.

John Peacock demonstrates that Jones draws many of his ornamental motifs used in the 1630s masque proscenia from *Le Livre de la conquête de la Toison d’or par le prince Iason de Tessalie* (1563). *Le Livre* comprises 26 engravings by René Boyvin, based on designs by Léonard Thiry and inspired by Rosso Fiorentino’s decorations at Fontainebleau. The *Florimène* frieze is sourced in this book’s collection of grotesque cartouches, which draw on many iconographic sources including full-scale Bacchanaliae.<sup>59</sup> However, Jones’ description reveals that his intended emphasis is not strictly Bacchal, but rather evokes a general ambience of ‘pastoral rites and sacrifices’. In this way, he conveys in the pastoral genre a celebration of innocent and natural religiosity that may be seen to support, indeed to make ancient and venerable, Henrietta Maria’s Catholicism.

*Chloridia* (1631) prepares for its pastoral opening scene with a proscenium ‘composed of foliage, or leaves, heightened with gold and interwoven with all sorts of flowers, and naked children playing and climbing among the branches’.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, 2 vols, ed. Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1973), 2. 632, 2–10.

<sup>59</sup> See Peacock, *The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones*, pp. 235–66.

<sup>60</sup> Orgel and Strong, *Inigo Jones*, 2. 420, 12–15.

The extant vertical border sketch to go with this description – naked boys among scrolling foliage – shares much with Edward Pearce’s frieze-work designs, as Orgel and Strong note.<sup>61</sup> Karen Britland draws attention to the abundance of boys throughout *Chloridia*, including the ‘plump boy’ Zephyrus (26) and ‘the boy’ Cupid (90), as well as the proscenium’s ‘naked children playing’, and concludes not unreasonably: ‘The figure of Chloris is therefore surrounded in the masque with images of fecundity in a manner that befits Henrietta Maria’s position as a young wife and the mother of the Stuart heir’.<sup>62</sup>

In the proscenium description for *Tempe Restored* (1632), Jones shows that there is more to naked boys than a softened Bacchic pastoralism suggestive of royal ideology and fecundity. This proscenium depicts the noble personifications of Invention and Knowledge counter-pointed with the satyr-figures of Envy and Curious Ignorance. The distracting influence of the latter pair upon the former is symbolized by a miscellany of naked boys:

[C]hildren holding ugly masks before their faces, in action as if they would affright them [that is, Invention and Knowledge]; others riding on tame beasts, and some blowing such writhen trumps as make confused noise; in the corners sat other children hardening of darts in lamps. But Invention and Knowledge seem not to be diverted from their study by these childish bugbears.<sup>63</sup>

Jones is employing the continental idea of ‘panic’ frights. These are, at best, idle distractions and, at worst, bugbears and spooks that induce real panic. They are emblemized by children using fright masks, so-called ‘larvate *putti*’, for ‘*larva*’ means ‘mask’ as well as ‘spectre’.<sup>64</sup> Apuleius explains (in Charles Dempsey’s paraphrase) that ‘such small sprites...are only capable of harming the wicked, but are powerless against the good, who are well armed by philosophy and religion’.<sup>65</sup> Jones is using naked children in exactly this way to depict the assault on the humanist scholar-artist by Envy and Curious Ignorance.

<sup>61</sup> *Inigo Jones*, 2. 423–24.

<sup>62</sup> Karen Britland, ‘All Emulation Cease, and Jars’: Political Possibilities in *Chloridia*, Queen Henrietta Maria’s Masque of 1631’, *The Ben Jonson Journal* 9 (2002), 87–108 (pp. 89–90).

<sup>63</sup> Orgel and Strong, *Inigo Jones*, 2. 480, 34–39.

<sup>64</sup> See Dempsey, *Inventing*, pp. 102–03. Dempsey discusses ‘larvate *putti*’ at length (*Inventing*, pp. 66–71, 89–106, 112–29), linking them to Bacchanalian images via the Virgilian story of masks being used to frighten goats away from young vines (*Georgics*, 2.371–96), and to the humanists via the idea of satyr-masked *putti* as emblems of *facetiae*.

<sup>65</sup> Dempsey, *Inventing*, p. 103.

The latter personifications indicate the malign forces (and perhaps specifically Ben Jonson after his bitter break with Jones) that set themselves against knowledgeable and successful men. Invention and Knowledge triumph, while the larvate *putti* are given an aesthetically pleasing though chaotically disturbing role (wherein Jones can display his invention and condemn his rivals) akin to the antimasque.

Antique-work friezes do literally appear (or at least are unmistakably echoed) in the form of lively antimasques (complete with costumed boys) in a number of Stuart masques, and Robert White's *Cupid's Banishment* (1617) is extraordinary in having a Bacchic triumph as its antimasque.<sup>66</sup> The antique-work decorative frieze proves to be highly plastic and metamorphic, compressing down to small printed borders and headpieces, and yet also expanding outward to fill masque proscenia and even the antimasque itself. The form is capable of diverse semantic loading and affirms the close aesthetic alliance of: antique-work friezes; the antic posturing and bizarre forms of antimasque; the presence of boy actors and boy characters; and the Bacchanalian procession. Real boys are a longstanding feature of court masques and they frequently act the antimasque roles, which puts them at the centre of a semantic nexus of cognates of the word 'antique' (signifying variously antic, classical, grotesque-work, and the bizarre).

### Conclusion

The naked boy is a unique and multivalent feature of the classical decorative revival in early modern England. His aesthetic value as a vehicle for varying forms of energy is fully exploited by English artists from Holbein to Jones and Cleyn within the context of the antique-work assemblage and its related motifs. Antique-work, at some fundamental level, signifies not only the fact and power of artistic invention (predicated on *imitatio* of the ancients), but points toward the semi-divine capacity of early modern humankind to re-compose the world. It is a symptom of and metonymy for the educated western human condition in a time of astonishing conceptual expansion and cultural transformation. No other style of art in Tudor and Stuart England comes close to matching the sheer

<sup>66</sup> See *The Memorable Masque* (1613) (Orgel and Strong, 1.256–58); Francis Beaumont's *Masque of the Inner Temple and Grey's Inn* (1613) (*English Masques*, ed. Herbert Arthur Evans (London: Blackie and Son, 1897), pp. 94–95, 90); and *Cupid's Banishment* in, *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (1996; rpt. London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 76–89.

proliferation of grotesque-work – a form that has built into it an unprecedented self-awareness of its own praxis and its own unsettling implications.

The naked boy embedded in this world is, in some deep way, a *spiritello* emblematic of the early modern self. He exercises imitative play and Bacchic ecstasy within an infinitely reorganisable chaosmos, thereby demonstrating the importance of both reason and fantasy in humanistic dealings with the world. His signifying power (in conjunction with antique-work) is immense as may be seen in his evocation of humanist wit, Bacchic Neoplatonism, Christian meditation, courtier lavishness, religio-political ideology, artistic invention, philosophical scepticism, and anarchic distraction from the truth. With such a range of expressive power, it is no wonder that the antique-work chaosmos, locked between reason and unreason, baffles denotative encapsulation, and that the boy himself, locked between ornament and narrative, escapes (at least till now) theorisation.

The naked boy is native to a fluid world that he not only explores and tampers with, but which he in part creates and is fully implicated within as an incarnate motive principle. He is a motif and yet a mind – indeed, a thinking commodity, just like his parent. He is the early modern Englishman as experimenter and maker; as artist, humanist and serious joker; as imitator and innovator; as divine impulse and demonic distraction; and ultimately, as cosmic protagonist and child.

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