

Edited by Robin O'Bryan and Felicia Else

# Giants and Dwarfs in European Art and Culture, ca. 1350-1750

Real, Imagined, Metaphorical

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Giants and Dwarfs in European Art and Culture, ca. 1350–1750

# Monsters and Marvels. Alterity in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds

This series is dedicated to the study of cultural constructions of difference, abnormality, the monstrous, and the marvelous from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including the history of science and medicine, literary studies, the history of art and architecture, philosophy, gender studies, disability studies, critical race studies, ecocriticism, and other forms of critical theory. Single-author volumes and collections of original essays that cross disciplinary boundaries are particularly welcome. The editors seek proposals on a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to: the aesthetics of the grotesque; political uses of the rhetoric or imagery of monstrosity; theological, social, and literary approaches to witches and the demonic in their broader cultural context; the global geography of the monstrous, particularly in relation to early modern colonialism; the role of the monstrous in the history of concepts of race; the connections between gender and sexual normativity and discourses of monstrosity; juridical and other legal notions of the monstrous; the history of teratology; technologies that mimic life such as automata; wild men; hybrids (human/animal; man/machine); and concepts of the natural and the normal.

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“And just as we consider Pygmies to be dwarfs, so they consider us giants ...  
And in the land of the Giants, who are larger than we are, we would be  
considered dwarfs by them.”

Attributed to Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Orientalis* (1216–24),  
cited as an example of the Scriptural command to avoid judging  
the oddities of other men

“Nothing in love: now does he feel his title  
Hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe  
Upon a dwarfish thief.”

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 2



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*Robin O'Bryan*

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# Introduction: Giants and Dwarfs as Real, Imagined, and Metaphorical Entities\*

*Robin O'Bryan*

## Abstract

This introductory chapter provides a broad survey of the ways in which the enthusiasm for giants and dwarfs pervaded European art and culture in the late medieval and early modern eras. As well as examining dwarfs and the occasional giant who served in the courts, the discussion extends to giants and dwarfs featuring in courtly and public festivities. From there it moves on to show how dwarfs became ubiquitous motifs in painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts, with giants portrayed literally or expressed metaphorically in colossal figures. As the investigation reveals, despite their variations in size, giants and dwarfs were frequently invested with the same symbolism and character traits, assigned magical properties, and viewed in both negative and positive ways.

**Keywords:** European courts, festivals, chivalric romances, monsters, apotropaia, gender

Published in 1868, Edward Wood's *Giants and Dwarfs* is a treasure trove of facts and legends about giants and dwarfs that range from the real to the improbable to the downright impossible. He tells us of biblical giants like the Nephilim who commingled with the daughters of men, and the mighty Goliath who was eight to twenty feet tall and killed by David.

\* The essays in this volume adopt the terminology “dwarf,” recognizing that there is not unanimity among scholars for the use of this term. For related issues, see note 77 below. In accordance with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the plural “dwarfs” is also used rather than “dwarves,” the latter a variant popularized in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien in the 1930s.

Among the mythological giants, the Cyclops Polyphemus lived in a cave and fed upon human flesh, with Antaeus of Libya meeting his match in his battle with Hercules. In Roman times the emperor Maximinus Thrax (the Thracian, r. 235–38) was said to have topped almost nine feet, his hands so large he used his wife's bracelet for a thumb-ring.<sup>1</sup> Over a thousand years later it was claimed that the Dutch giant Nicholas Kieten could carry men under his arms as if they were children, and that four people could stand together in one of his massive shoes.<sup>2</sup> Dwarfs, too, were described in equally fantastic terms. Conflated with the mythical pygmies of the monstrous races, they were similarly reputed to live in caves and likewise did battle with Hercules (after he defeated Antaeus with whom they had claimed an alliance). Of actual dwarf individuals, the grammarian and poet Philetas of Cos (ca. 340–ca. 270 BCE) was reputed to be so small and slender he had to keep lead in his pockets to keep from being blown away.<sup>3</sup> At the opposite end of the tiny spectrum was Uladislau Cubitalis, the mighty "pygmy king of Poland," who lived in 1306 and whose victories in battle were deemed to be more glorious than his full-sized predecessors.<sup>4</sup>

Wood's colorful recounting speaks to the societal fascination with giants and dwarfs that flourished in late medieval and early modern Europe when interest in such human marvels became an overarching cultural phenomenon. Contributing to their popularity was their portrayal in a range of literary works, both ancient and medieval accounts of the monstrous races, as well as theological writings, pseudo-histories, travelogues, scientific tracts, epic poems, and especially the chivalric romances and their parodical offshoots. From the first flowering of the Arthurian and Carolingian legends in the twelfth century until well into the seventeenth, regional authors produced their own variations in which dwarfs and giants played a role, the two often acting in concert with or pitted against each other. Part of folkloric traditions, giants and dwarfs also received prominent attention in the visual arts and entertainments, and in the pageants, carnivals, and fairs that were a mainstay of contemporary life. In this introductory chapter we look at the breadth of ways that the vogue for giants and dwarfs was expressed in European art and culture, touching upon some of the people

1 Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 23.

2 Ibid., 86.

3 Ibid., 267.

4 Ibid., 269. His name Cubitalis no doubt emanates from "cubit," the ancient unit of measure that was equal to about 18 inches (44 centimeters).

and places, themes and subtexts that will be treated in more detail by the essays in this volume.

## Dwarfs and Giants as Court Denizens

After the fashion of the Egyptian pharaohs and Roman emperors, dwarfs became a common fixture of the imperial, royal, and princely courts throughout Europe, where they served as requisite symbols of status and nobility for the ruling elite.<sup>5</sup> Within the courtly household, dwarfs assumed a variety of functions. Special dwarf individuals were employed as personal attendants, valued for their loyalty, intelligence, and other remarkable qualities, and sometimes provided with their own servants and horses (and even houses).<sup>6</sup> Others were entrusted with important tasks. As king of Spain Philip II (r. 1556–98) used his dwarf Gonzalo de Liaño (nicknamed Gonzalillo), not only as a *portero de cámara* (gentleman of the bedchamber), but also for diplomatic activities with the Italian courts, where he acted as informer and art agent.<sup>7</sup> A few court dwarfs may even have provided spiritual counsel. Records indicate that in the early 1540s a *frate nano* (friar dwarf) accompanied Eleonora of Toledo from Naples to the Medici ducal court in Florence which later saw the Jesuitical dwarf Pietro Barbino in residence, while at the court of the Habsburg king Philip IV (r. 1621–65) in Spain one dwarf was listed as a *monja* (nun).<sup>8</sup> Dwarfs might also be assigned the role of animal caretaker, serve as playmates to the ruler's children, or amuse the court with buffoon-like antics. Court

5 Although less studied, there is ample documentation of dwarfs serving in the medieval courts in England, Italy, Norman Sicily, Aragon, Castille, Portugal, Burgundy, France, Germany, and the duchy of Guelders. On their role as status symbols in the Italian Renaissance princely courts, see O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight."

6 Catherine de' Medici's dwarfs were supplied with their own servants, and at the Medici court Pietro Barbino was not only allotted a servant but was also provided with a house. More impressive were the benefits accorded Jeffrey Hudson (1619–1682) at the royal court in London. As well as being furnished with a servant, he was given a gentleman's education (including French lessons that allowed him to better communicate with the French-born queen), and was instructed in fencing, shooting, riding, and dancing; see Postlewait, "Court Wonder," and further discussion in this chapter.

7 On Gonzalillo, see Kubersky-Piredda and Pons, "Travels of a Court Jester."

8 The list compiled in 1543 identifying those in Eleonora's household includes an entry for *il frate nano et un servitor* (the friar dwarf and a servant); Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato [hereafter ASF, MdP] 616, ins. 21, fol. 623r. On Pietro Barbino, who may have also offered the duchess spiritual counsel, see O'Bryan, "Tortoise, a Fish," 137. Moreno Villa identifies one dwarf at the Spanish court in 1624 as a nun in *Locos, enanos*, 20.

documents give abundant evidence of the extravagant gifts and luxurious clothing furnished the resident dwarfs, the latter an essential ingredient to enhance their appearance when accompanying their patrons in protocol and in portraiture.<sup>9</sup> Outfitting the court's dwarfs in elegant fashions was an important marker of status, and hence nobility, in an age when clothes made the man (and woman).

As well as individual dwarfs offering their services to potential patrons, the court and its agents undertook efforts to acquire dwarfs from local provinces and other territories, near and abroad. Dwarfs were also presented as diplomatic gifts. In the sixteenth century dwarfs from Poland were popular, bestowed by Polish royals such as Sigismund II Augustus (r. 1530–72) and other Polish officials to the European courts with which they wished to curry favor.<sup>10</sup> Although dwarfs of any size and bodily structure were welcome additions to the courtly entourage, especially desirable were those individuals possessed of proportionate stature, the dwarfs presenting as scaled-down versions of a body of normative stature.<sup>11</sup> Period chronicles, letters, and other writings took careful note of these “ideal miniatures.”<sup>12</sup> Arriving at the royal court in London in 1577 the proportionate female dwarf Thomasin de Paris became Elizabeth I's cherished companion, the queen favoring her with expensive gifts and dressing her in the latest fashion.<sup>13</sup> Two years later Queen Regent Catherine de' Medici wrote the French ambassador to Constantinople, asking him to procure her one or two of the “well formed” (*bien formez*) dwarfs that were to be found in the circle of the sultan, and promising to reimburse him forthwith.<sup>14</sup> Bianca Cappello, wife of Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici (r. 1574–87), followed suit, her ambassador in Warsaw tasked to find her a dwarf *ben proportionata* (“well-proportioned”).<sup>15</sup>

9 Dwarfs were sometimes even provided with their own tailors. Court records for Catherine de' Medici list expenses paid to the dwarf's tailor in 1585; *Discours merveilleux*, 118.

10 Among the beneficiaries of dwarfs from Poland were Grand Duchess Bianca Cappello at the Medici court in Florence, Queen Catherine de' Medici, Emperor Charles V, King Philip II of Spain, Archduke Ferdinand II in Innsbruck, and Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini shortly before being elected Pope Clement VIII in 1592.

11 The definition given by the Mayo Clinic (“Dwarfism”) for proportionate dwarfism is when “all parts of the body are small to the same degree and appear to be proportioned like a body of average stature.”

12 Seemann uses this terminology in her essay in chapter 6.

13 See Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, 110.

14 The 1579 letter is quoted in Médicis and Baguenault de Puchesse, *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, 189 n. 1.

15 ASF, MdP 5928, fol. 106, letter from Alberto Bolognetti to Bianca Cappello, dated February 2, 1582.

In 1633 the French ambassador Duc Charles de Créqui came to the Holy See accompanied by his dwarf Michael Magnanus, lauded as “the marvel (*maraviglia*) of all Rome” for his tiny stature and proportionate limbs.<sup>16</sup> Around the same time the proportionate dwarf Jeffrey Hudson, nicknamed “Lord Minimus,” was enlisted to serve as the personal attendant to Henrietta Maria de’ Medici, Queen Consort to Charles I of England (r. 1625–49). As well as Jeffrey’s use in royal diplomacy, he became famous for his exploits (including having been captured by pirates).<sup>17</sup>

Much less prominent because of their rarity, giants duly figured in European court life although not operating in the same capacity. (Nor, not surprisingly, does it appear that they were ever presented as diplomatic gifts.) In the mid-fifteenth century, the Burgundian duke Philip the Good (r. 1419–67) had the giant Hans, who was described by a chronicler as “the largest, without artifice, that I have ever seen.”<sup>18</sup> In Jean de Chassanion’s *De gigantibus* (first published 1580), the French canon reported that King François I (r. 1515–47) had come across a giant in Bordeaux and lured him to his court to serve as a guard; finding court life was not to his liking the giant soon departed.<sup>19</sup> The Catalan giant Don Juan Biladons joined a host of dwarfs listed among the retainers of Philip IV in 1636, although that giant’s tenure also seems to have been short.<sup>20</sup> Giants were also attached to the Tyrolean courts of the Habsburg archdukes, where one served as a gatekeeper, another as a bodyguard.<sup>21</sup> And at the courts of the English kings James I (r. 1603–25) and his son Charles I, two giants, Walter Parsons and William Evans, were assigned the role of porter, their heft duly perceived to be appropriate to their station.

16 See Lavin and Lavin, “Duquesnoy’s ‘Nano di Créqui,’” 133 and n. 9; and Lingo, *François Duquesnoy and the Greek Ideal*, 105. Magnanus is discussed further by O’Byrne in chapter 8 of this volume.

17 Postlewait provides the best account of Jeffrey’s life in “‘Court Wonder,’” but also see Southworth, *Fools and Jesters*, 152–61; and Griffey, “Multum in parvo.”

18 [...] “ung geant plus grant, sans nul artifice, que je visse oncques”; quoted in de la Marche, *Mémoires*, 2:362.

19 Chassanion commented on his *mira corporis magnitudine hominem*; *De gigantibus*, ch. 6, 27–28; and cited in Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 87.

20 Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 48.

21 In addition to Niklas Haidl who functioned as a gatekeeper for Archduke Sigmund (discussed by Rabanser in chapter 5 and see n. 39 below), the giant Bartlmä Bon (Bartolomeo Bona) served as a *Trabant* (bodyguard) for Archduke Ferdinand II. I thank Thomas Kuster for this information on Bon.



Figure I.1 Anthony van Dyck, *Queen Henrietta Maria with Sir Jeffrey Hudson*, 1633. Oil on canvas, 219.1 × 134.8 cm (86 ¼ × 53 ⅙ in.). Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington. Artwork in the public domain.



## Giants and Dwarfs in Portraiture

Acknowledging the importance of dwarfs as essential to their position, European rulers had their resident dwarfs portrayed in imagery which showed them as attendants to their patrons or family members. As might be expected, proportionate dwarfs made excellent visual companions. Catherine de' Medici appears with a proportionate male dwarf at her side in a tapestry of 1575, the dwarf wearing a red cape and gesturing to the tournament taking place before them.<sup>22</sup> In a grand portrait painted in 1633 Anthony van Dyck depicted Queen Henrietta Maria accompanied by the fourteen-year-old dwarf Jeffrey Hudson, dressed smartly in red satin and

<sup>22</sup> Now housed in the Uffizi, the *Bayonne Tournament* forms part of the eight-piece set known as the Valois Tapestries woven in Flanders in 1575.

sporting a small leashed monkey on his arm (figure I.1).<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey and other (non-proportionate) dwarfs were also depicted as singular subjects unto themselves.<sup>24</sup> Although Diego Velázquez was to become famous for his full-length portraits of dwarfs in the seventeenth century, in fact, already by the mid-sixteenth century in Florence, Agnolo Bronzino had set an important precedent with his double-sided portrait of the Medici dwarf Morgante (who, however, was shown completely nude); he was shortly followed by Anthonis Mor's portrait of Cardinal Granvelle's dwarf and dog (figure I.2).<sup>25</sup> Given their scarcity, giants received less attention in portraiture, although the archducal collection in Innsbruck contained a few life-size, full-length portraits of giants produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (as seen, for example, in figure 5.6). Occasionally the court's giant and dwarf were portrayed together.<sup>26</sup> The most remarkable rendering is the portrait produced in 1580 for Archduke Ferdinand II (r. 1564–95) (figure 11.7). Although the anonymous artist appears to have exaggerated the height of the giant—if not miniaturized the dwarf—to show each as exceptional in size, the two figures have evidently been portrayed true to scale.<sup>27</sup>

23 On Jeffrey's close relationship to the queen, see especially Postlewait, "Court Wonder'."

24 Griffey provides a thorough discussion on Jeffrey's depiction in portraiture in "Multum in parvo." An early extant example of a portrait of a court dwarf is the small (less than six inches in height) half-scale portrait of a dwarf painted in the 1530s by a Netherlandish artist in the style of Corneille de Lyon. Now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the work is viewable at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435958>.

25 For Morgante, see O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf." Of note, Margaret of Austria, duchess of Savoy, had a painting by Jan Gossaert, which an inventory of 1524 identified as showing the two dwarfs of Christian II of Denmark in the guise of Adam and Eve; Tietze-Conrat, *Dwarfs and Jesters*, 90, and Eichberger, "Cultural Centre in the Southern Netherlands," 1:252. If the record was correct that two dwarfs were portrayed nude, this manner of presentation would have preceded the Morgante portrait by some twenty-five years. Mor's painting of "Granvelle's Dwarf" is discussed in Ravenscroft's chapter 7 and by O'Bryan in chapter 8.

26 Jeffrey Hudson and the giant William Evans were depicted in a stone relief in Bullhead Court, Newgate Street, London, and in a broadsheet from 1636 (which shows them together with an allegedly 153-year-old man). In the Horse Armoury in the Tower of London a suit of armor allegedly belonging to Jeffrey (but probably made for the five-year-old Charles I) was also exhibited next to the so-called "Giant's armour," the display part of a vogue in princely collections; see below. I thank Felicia Else for bringing this exhibit to my attention.

27 See Rabanser's discussion in chapter 5. Verisimilitude was not the objective in the preparatory drawing (1581–83) by Lorenzo Costa the Younger who greatly magnified the height of the giant Guglielmo in his juxtaposition with the dwarf Frambaldo, both denizens of the fourteenth-century Gonzaga court; the drawing is now housed in the British Museum ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1946-0713-526](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1946-0713-526)). The giant and dwarf are discussed further in this chapter.



Figure I.2 Anthonis Mor, *Cardinal Granvelle's Dwarf with Dog*, 1550–60. Oil on wood, 126 × 92 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

## Giants and Dwarfs in Court and Public Entertainments

As well as their portrayal in the imagery produced for the courts, giants (both actual and effigies) and dwarfs were featured in courtly performances and pageants. Especially popular were the allegorical entertainments inspired by chivalric literary works, which provided the script for how such activities were to be conducted.<sup>28</sup> For the wedding festivities staged in Burgundy when Duke Charles the Bold married Margaret of York in 1468, one event had a giant led in on a chain held by the dwarf, with the two then guarding a golden fir tree.<sup>29</sup> Almost a century later Catherine de' Medici and her son

<sup>28</sup> Chief among these were the *pas d'armes* (literally “passage of arms”), a type of joust in which knights defended their turf against attackers.

<sup>29</sup> Cartellieri provides an excellent account of the proceedings in *Court of Burgundy*, 124–34.

Charles conducted a mock tournament at which six maidens were held captive in a castle, and a dwarf and a giant acted as sentries.<sup>30</sup> In 1664 for the grand spectacle organized for Louis XIV in the gardens at Versailles, one of the constructed sets was of an enchanted island where giants and dwarfs (together with demons and spirits) served as guards.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes the court's entertainments assumed a more fanciful flavor. At the marital feast of Duke Philip the Good and Isabella of Portugal in 1430, Hans *le géant* was dressed in the skins of a wild man and jumped out of a pie to wrestle the dwarf Madame d'Or.<sup>32</sup> More often than not it was the *dwarf* who was encased in the confection. A special banquet held in Pavia in 1509 for the visiting French king Louis XII featured a nude *pigmeo* popping out from the pastry to dance a *moresca*, while Jeffrey Hudson was the surprise "pie filling" at an event held in honor of Charles I and Henrietta Maria in 1626.<sup>33</sup> Eleven days later—by which time Jeffrey had assumed residence at their royal court—he appeared in a masque loosely based on François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (composed ca. 1532–64).<sup>34</sup> One act had the dwarf emerging from the pocket of the eponymous giant Gargantua (played by William Evans), with the two then engaging in a fencing contest.

Dwarfs and giants were also regularly featured in the civic and religious pageants and other festivities that were a constant of medieval and early modern life. Because of their relative rarity, the role of giants was typically enacted by people walking on stilts or taking the form of colossal effigies. (In fact, most of the court entertainments must have resorted to using these fabricated giants.) In the early sixteenth century, Baldassare Castiglione commented on a Carnival entertainment in Rome describing the giants "which outwardly looked like great men and horses in a triumph but inside were stuffed with rags and straw."<sup>35</sup> Traveling to Spain in 1586, the artist Federico Zuccari reported on the ancient custom festival in Toledo at which twelve giants and two dwarfs danced to tambourines and drums in the

30 Frieda, *Catherine de' Medici*, 182.

31 Weil, "Love, Monsters, Movements, and Machines," 175. The event was inspired by Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, written in 1516.

32 Calmette, *Golden Age of Burgundy*, 233.

33 See Grumello, *Cronaca di Antonio Grumello*, 120; and for Jeffrey, Postlewait, "Court Wonder," 627–29. As Postlewait notes, the banquet was presented by the duke of Buckingham as part of his campaign to gain favor with the queen, a gambit which seems to have worked. At the conclusion of the event, Jeffrey departed with the queen to enter her service.

34 Postlewait, "Court Wonder," discusses Jeffrey's role in a variety of performances sponsored by the royal court, including in masques written by Ben Jonson and William Davenant.

35 Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier* (4.7), 286.

church before the feast of Corpus Domini (Christi).<sup>36</sup> This same festivity was reenacted in the seventeenth century in Madrid with eight *gigantes* and two *gigantillas* (giantesses), and in other Spanish cities with giants and big-headed "dwarfs" called *cabezudos*.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes the giants were constructed to represent important personages. For a festival held in Provence in the fifteenth century, St. Christopher was portrayed as a giant, his body formed of hoops covered by a long white dress and his arms outstretched in the form of a cross, with his right arm supporting the small figure of the Christ child.<sup>38</sup>

Giants also played a dominant role in festivities used to assert civic identity and autonomy. In a triumphal pageant conducted for Henry V's (r. 1413–22) entry into London in 1415, a male and female giant were positioned at the entrance of London Bridge, the male equipped with the keys to the city suggesting his function as porter—and giving a nod to the literary tradition of giants serving as keepers of city gates.<sup>39</sup> In Douai (then part of Flanders) in the sixteenth century, the annual parade honoring the city's resistance against a takeover by French forces featured a family of wickerwork giants: Monsieur Gayant, some twenty-two feet tall, accompanied by Madame Gayant and their giant children.<sup>40</sup> In another public celebration held in Antwerp in 1685, eight giants dressed in the costumes of Spain, the Netherlands, France, and England surrounded the giant Antigonus representing Antwerp itself, symbolizing that the city was in peaceful accord with these other nations.<sup>41</sup>

While court dwarfs often accompanied their imperial, royal, or princely patrons on their grand entries into cities, giants taking the form of effigies or depicted in imagery were duly used in festivities celebrating or asserting rulers' authority. The decorations on a triumphal arch erected in honor of Emperor Charles V (r. 1519–56) and his son Philip II's formal entry into Antwerp in 1549 featured an evocation of the *Gigantomachy*, the mythical battle between the giants and gods, which was used as a metaphor for "Habsburg triumphalism."<sup>42</sup> In their travelogue *A Journey into Spain* published in 1670, the Dutch authors reported on the festivities held for Corpus Christi

36 Entry for May 29, 1586 contained in Luchinat, *Zuccari*, 2:286.

37 Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias in Spain*, 363–64.

38 Fairholt, *Gog and Magog*, 105–6.

39 Ibid., 27–28. In Middle High German epics, for example, giants were portrayed as keepers of city gates; Pinkus, "Giant of Bremen," 408. A similar function was assigned to the giant Niklas Haidl mentioned in n. 21 above.

40 See, among others, Fairholt, *Gog and Magog*, 78–86.

41 Ibid., 73–74.

42 Wouk, *Frans Floris*, 150–51.

in Spanish villages that featured two giantesses dubbed *Mammelins* after the Moorish king who once reigned, the tradition incorporating imaginary giants—and females at that—into their historical past.<sup>43</sup>

## Enter the Colossus in Statuary

Concomitant with the period fascination with real and imagined giants was the taste for colossal statuary. (Here we might note that the word “giant” was commonly used as a synonym for “colossus”; hence the advertisement in 1742 for the eight-foot Swedish giant that referred to him as a “Living Colossus.”<sup>44</sup>) In 1463 the Florentine sculptor Agostino d’Antonio di Duccio was commissioned to sculpt a *gigante* for the tribune of the exterior of the city’s Duomo, the unfinished block of marble later used by Michelangelo to create his gigantic statue of David, which became a symbol of Florence.<sup>45</sup> As with the statue of David, sculptors frequently assigned oversized proportions to their representations of heroic figures. Between the mid-fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, over thirty colossal statues were made of the legendary hero Roland (Orlando in the Italian versions of the chivalric romances) and erected in northern Germany, Verona, and in Dole in eastern France.<sup>46</sup> Giants and their evocations were also popular components of garden imagery.<sup>47</sup> On the grounds of Fontainebleau in the 1560s, Francesco Primaticcio created massive muscular giants (atlases) emerging from the blocks comprising the Grotte des Pins (Grotto of the Pines), his conception apparently indebted to Giulio Romano’s designs for the *Fall of the Giants* fresco in the Gonzaga Palazzo del Te in Mantua.<sup>48</sup> In the Medici Boboli Gardens in Florence, Valerio Cioli portrayed Morgante nude and seated on a tortoise (ca. 1564) (see figure 11.4), the dwarf’s outsized proportions suggestive of a giant, appropriately so since he was named after the giant in Luigi Pulci’s comic epic poem *Morgante Maggiore* (ca. 1483).

43 Brunel and van Aerssen, *Journey into Spain*, 84.

44 Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 142–44.

45 Paoletti, *Michelangelo’s David*, 33, and 210–11 (contracts 28 and 29).

46 Roland/Orlando was the “semihistorical, semilegendary” military leader who was the hero of the Charlemagne epics; see the excellent discussion by Pinkus, “Giant of Bremen”; and by Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 173 and n. 168 who observes that giants were “connected to local cults, liturgically sanctioned, of Charlemagne.”

47 In Italy at least fifty colossal statues or sculptural groups were produced in the sixteenth century, with many displayed in gardens; Morgan, *Monster in the Garden*, 126.

48 Blunt and Beresford, *Art and Architecture in France*, 56.

## Origins and Ancestry

With giants referenced as primordial ancestors several times in the Bible, it may be little wonder that superhuman beings were absorbed into the lore of various locales, either portrayed as forces to overcome in battle or as heroic giants who gave rise to their kingdoms. Geoffrey of Monmouth relates in his twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain* how Brutus of Troy, the founder and first king of Britain, had to battle giants including the twelve-foot-tall Gogmagog, before cultivation and civilization could begin.<sup>49</sup> In Italy, Anniius of Viterbo published a work in 1498 arguing that the Etruscans were descended from giants; he was followed by Giambattista Gelli who issued his *Il trattello sull'origine di Firenze* (The Treatise on the Origins of Florence) at the Accademia Fiorentina (Florentine Academy) in 1544. Claiming that giants were the native inhabitants of Tuscany, Gelli proposed that they battled alongside Noah (himself cast as a giant) when he landed in Tuscany after the Flood, with the giants subsequently slain by Hercules who then founded the city of Florence.<sup>50</sup> Rabelais picked up on a similar conceit in his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* with the giant Hurtaly (the ancestor of the volume's namesake giants and one of 300 giants in the text), who, like Noah, reigned in the time of the Flood.<sup>51</sup>

As well as regional and civic histories, giants and dwarfs were duly incorporated in the crafting of stories of dynastic origins and their representation in art. In Mario Equicola's *Dell'istoria di Mantova* (On the History of Mantua, 1607), tracing the founding of Mantua he cites the dwarf Frambaldo together with the giant Guglielmo di Grasignana in the court of the first Gonzaga rulers.<sup>52</sup> The two were portrayed in a fresco in the ducal palace in the 1570s, which showed Luigi Gonzaga taking the oath of office after seizing control to assume the rank of "Captain of the People" in 1328.<sup>53</sup> In Florence, rather than incorporate the heroic giant into the legend to explain their mythical origins, the Medici cast their dynastic hero as a

49 Fairholt, *Gog and Magog*, 1859

50 Werner provides the synopsis in "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 130. Gelli also claimed that the Tuscan language was a derivative of ancient Aramaic brought to the region by Noah, a theory that asserted Florentine preeminence over Rome and was used to great advantage in Duke Cosimo I de' Medici's (r. 1537–74) propagandistic initiatives.

51 Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 195–96. This reference to the Flood served as an implicit benchmark alluding to the giants' perceived size since the account in Genesis allowed that they had to have been at least fifteen cubits (22.5 feet) tall to have survived the deluge.

52 Equicola, *Dell'istoria di Mantova*, 83.

53 Lorenzo Costa's drawing, mentioned in n. 27 above, was the preliminary study for this fresco.



Figure 1.3 Giulio Romano, detail of dwarf in *Vision of the Cross*, ca. 1520. Fresco, Sala di Costantino, Palazzo Vaticano, Rome. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

giant-killer, a popular literary topos (reflected as well in the proliferation of images showing David proudly displaying the decapitated, oversized head of Goliath). According to the familial account, in a battle fought with a giant by their ancestor, a paladin in Charlemagne's army, the giant's mace left the imprint on the ancestor's shield, which subsequently gave rise to the Medici *palle* device (a shield surmounted by six- to eight balls (*palle*)).<sup>54</sup> This seems to be the intended reference in the Vatican's Sala di Costantino fresco painted by Raphael and Giulio Romano for the Medici pope Leo X (r. 1513–21), where the (fictitious) dwarf has laid aside his mace to place it on the shield by his feet (figure 1.3).<sup>55</sup> Reinforcing the ancestral pun, Romano

54 On the legend, see Tolkowsky, "Palle' of the Medici," 91–92, and Paoletti, *Michelangelo's David*, 171 n. 84.

55 I discuss the dwarf's role (and Romano's hand) in this fresco in O'Bryan, "Medici Pope, Curative Puns," which also corrects his traditional misidentification as Gradasso Berretini da Norcia (an error I unfortunately perpetuated in "Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight").



showed the dwarf's foot resting on a rocky clump whose scalloped edges evoke the giant's toes.

## Caves and Bones

The fantastic written accounts of imaginary giants roaming the earth before the biblical Flood that tantalized the medieval and early modern imagination had been given credence by ancient authority, but the discovery of tombs and remains alleged to have belonged to giants offered tacit "confirmation" that these superhuman imaginary beings had actually existed.<sup>56</sup> Prehistoric fossils of large animals such as mammoths and elephants, but assumed to be the bones of giants, were often found in European caves, contributing to the notion that caves served as the giants' domiciles—and giving rise to the eponymous "Giant's Cave" dubbed these natural formations.<sup>57</sup> Paying homage to the belief that St. Christopher did indeed possess the stature of a twelve-cubit (at least eighteen feet) tall Canaanite giant, his gigantic tooth (actually that of a hippopotamus) was encased in a shrine of gold and silver and deposited as a relic in the Italian church of San Cristoforo in Vercelli, where it attracted faithful pilgrims.<sup>58</sup> In 1577 after examining the mammoth bones discovered under an uprooted oak tree in Lucerne, the noted Swiss physician Felix Platter declared that they could only be those of a giant, and that he (too) must have been eighteen feet tall.<sup>59</sup> Platter subsequently commissioned a life-size "portrait" of the giant that was put on display in the city hall of Lucerne. Pygmies also entered the discourse. Donald Monro produced his *Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* based on his travels in the Hebrides in 1549, reporting on the pygmy bones that had been dug up in a church on the aptly named Isle of Pigmies.<sup>60</sup>

Like his contemporaries, the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher took great interest in these preternatural findings. Himself no stranger to the

56 Nor was this idea confined to the early modern era. A giant presumed to have been discovered in an archaeological site in Thailand in July 2021 was actually shown to be an art installation!

57 Wood provides examples in *Giants and Dwarfs*, 40 passim.

58 Voragine describes St. Christopher as "gente Cananaeus [...] XII cubitos in longitudine possidebat" (*Legenda aurea*, 430); quoted in Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 45, with fuller discussion at 43–50. On the relic, see Gavazzi and Leland, *Father Gavazzi's Lectures*, 223–24. This is the same church that contains Gaudenzio Ferrari's fresco of the *Adoration of the Magi* (1532–34) which shows a dwarf in the Magi's entourage, a popular period artistic convention in Italy.

59 Katritzky, *Healing, Performance and Ceremony*, 201–2.

60 Monro's account of the pygmies appears in MacRitchie, "Pigmies' Isle in the Hebrides," 24.



Figure I.4 Athanasius Kircher, Giants from *Mundus Subterraneus*, ca. 1664. Artwork in the public domain.

collection of giants' body parts (he housed a "giant's tooth" in his study), in 1678 he published his scientific textbook *Mundus subterraneus* (Subterranean World). The work contains an illustration depicting famous giants, their scale indicated by their alignment with the common man (who presents as a dwarf in his juxtaposition with Goliath), progressing in size to the giants of Lucerne and Mauritania and then to the largest "Gigantis Sceleton," whose imaginary rendering was based on the bones allegedly found by Giovanni Bocaccio in Sicily in 1343 (figure I.4).<sup>61</sup> In the illustration, all the giants are bearded and appear in the nude save for their girdles and crowns comprised of leaves. Notably, the "Gigantis Sceleton"—which the description indicates is "200 cubitorium," or a whopping 300 feet tall—is shown standing next to a leafless tree. While this specific prop suggests the perpetuation of pictorial conventions such as used for Tyrolean depictions of warrior giants and giantesses and for St. Christopher (see, for example, figures 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, and 2.3), its stark trunk evokes the club of the wild man.<sup>62</sup> A popular

<sup>61</sup> Kircher, *Mundus Subterraneus*, 2:59.

<sup>62</sup> This manner of presentation is similar to the depiction of the giant Bartlmä Bon (Bartolomeo Bona) portrayed as a wild man in a tournament organized by Archduke Maximilian in Vienna

leitmotif in medieval art and literature, and also sharing features with the legendary pygmies, the wild man was the uncivilized savage who wore no clothes, lived in a cave, and whose weapon of choice was the club rather than the chivalric sword.<sup>63</sup>

## Giants and Dwarfs and Landscape

The period obsession with giants' bones duly extended to the realm of landscape, which tapped into the legends that primordial giants had created unique land masses.<sup>64</sup> *The Crying of ane Playe*, a Scottish dramatic text composed around 1512–15, contains a comic monologue delivered by a thousand-year-old dwarf named Wealth, who claimed descent from the Cornish giant Gog Magog and a giantess whose vagina was so big it could hold five whales, her spittle and urine giving rise to the distinctive features of the Scottish landscape.<sup>65</sup> As well as the "Giant's Cave" epithet, the intersection of giants and landscape was expressed in literature, with the interior of a giant's body becoming a cityscape in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and in Bronzino's poem "Il piato."<sup>66</sup> A seventeenth-century drawing by Stefano della Bella seems to poke fun at this conceit in showing a miniscule dwarf fishing from his perch on the nose of a giant, who extends his lower lip and opens his mouth to create a fishing hole for the tiny angler to cast his line; another dwarf is propped on his neck.<sup>67</sup> In the Medici garden at Pratolino, in 1579 Giambologna gave more tangible and concrete expression to the giant-as-landscape metaphor in his humongous sculpture of a giant (some thirty-five feet tall) representing the Apennine mountains (figure I.5). Internal passages allowed visitors to enter the

in 1560; see Rabanser, "Largo, Largo," 243–44, with illustration at fig. 105. In chapter 1 of this volume, Pinkus also discusses the wild man in connection with the giant illustrated in figure 1.2.

63 See Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*.

64 Avanzini and Kustatscher provide several examples in "Giganti di pietra," 34–37.

65 Fisher, "Crying of ane Playe," 32. Here the writer seems to be conflating the legendary giants Gog and Magog into one giant entity.

66 For Rabelais, see Smith, "Landscape and Body," and on Bronzino's "Il piato," Parker, *Bronzino*, especially 135–37. Bakhtin duly ties elements of French topography to giants, and especially to Gargantua, which inspired the name of a "great number of rocks, stones, megalithic formations, dolmens and menhirs"; *Rabelais and His World*, 342.

67 The drawing was put up for auction by Swan Galleries (Old Master Drawings, January 31, 2001, sale 1923, lot 43): <https://catalogue.swanngalleries.com/Lots/auction-lot/STEFANO-DELLA-BELLA-A-Dwarf-Fisherman-Seated-on-the-Nose-of-?saleno=1923&lotNo=43&refNo=503085>.



Figure I.5 Giambologna (Giovanni da Bologna), *Appennino*, ca. 1579. Medici gardens at Pratolino, Italy. Photo: Robin O'Bryan.

giant's body, effectively rendering the massive structure a "Giant's Cave."<sup>68</sup> Nor were regional landmasses connected only to legendary giants. The chivalric romance *Der kleine Rosengarten* (The Small Rose Garden, 1195–1210) featuring the dwarf king Laurin compared his famous rose garden to the color of the Dolomites mountain range, and the mountains themselves were thought to possess the spirit of dwarfs who guarded the minerals contained within.<sup>69</sup>

68 Although it was still possible to enter the structure in the 1990s (if not later), the interior is now closed to visitors. Della Bella also portrayed the Pratolino giant in a print from ca. 1653; see Cheng's discussion in chapter 10 and her figure 10.3.

69 See respectively, Avanzini and Kustatscher, "Giganti di pietra," 39–40, and Neuhauser, "Nani, giganti," 202. Laurin's *Der kleine Rosengarten* was so-named to differentiate it from *Der Rosengarten zu Worms* (The Big Rose Garden).

## Giants and Dwarfs on Display

Like paintings and sculptures of giants and dwarfs, bones and other *naturalia* alleged to have belonged to them were to be found in the *Kunstkammern*, *Wunderkammern*, and museums that flourished in the sixteenth and successive centuries.<sup>70</sup> The physician Thomas Molyneux was not too far off the mark when he observed in "An Essay Concerning Giants" (1684/85) that "there is hardly a considerable collection of this kind, or a printed description of a Museum extant, where some part or other of a Giant is not to be met with."<sup>71</sup> Writing in 1628 about the holdings in the museum established by his father in Naples, Francesco Imperato noted that the objects included the stuffed body of a "small pygmy, a little less than a span in height" (about nine inches), which he offered as confirmation that the Plinian race of pygmies had actually existed.<sup>72</sup> In 1657 Ulisse Aldrovandi's collection of "natural curiosities" (which included a hippopotamus tooth) was merged with that of Ferdinando Cospi in Bologna, who employed the "real" (proportionate) dwarfs Sebastiano Biavati and his sister Angelica as "living marvels" to guide visitors through the museum.<sup>73</sup> A "living marvel" of another kind was the wooden polychrome sculpture of Goliath fabricated by the Dutch sculptor Albert Jansz Vinckenbrinck in 1648–50. Part of a display of "moving sculptures" created to entertain paying foreigners visiting Amsterdam, the almost sixteen-foot-tall giant was flanked by the smaller statue of David sized at a little over five feet, the juxtaposition evocative of the giant and dwarf pairing.<sup>74</sup> Presaging the "Baroque theater of marvels," the giant's size together with its kinetic parts must have operated as a veritable expression of *merivaglie* intended to induce astonishment and wonder in the viewer.<sup>75</sup>

70 Since giants, like dwarfs, were themselves regarded as *naturalia*, it was fitting that their images joined the bones and relics of prehistoric mammoths and other gargantuan animals that were collected and put on display in the princely *Kunstkammern*.

71 Molyneux's remarks were first mentioned in the *Philosophical Transactions of February 1684/5*; "Essay Concerning Giants," 489.

72 See Imperato, *Discorsi intorno*, 32–37; and Findlen, "Jokes of Nature," 309.

73 On the natural curiosities in the collection, see Gigante, "Medici Patronage and Exotic Collectibles," 57–58, with the dwarfs discussed by Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 26–27, and Hanafi, *Monster in the Machine*, 85–87. As well as his depiction in the frontispiece to Lorenzo Legati's *Museo Cospiano* (Bologna, 1677), Sebastiano and Angelica were also portrayed in Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum historia* (History of Monsters, 1642); see discussion below.

74 See Vanhaelen, "Strange Things for Strangers," especially 44–49 and fig. 5. A normal-sized shield bearer was also part of the arrangement.

75 Kenseth provides an excellent discussion on the societal fascination with the "marvelous" during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the "Age of the Marvelous." Findlen refers to the "reinvention of the museum in the 1660s as a Baroque theater of marvels"; *Possessing Nature*, 26–27.



Figure I.6 Giovanni Battista de' Cavalieri, *Portrait of Re Picino*, 1585. Engraving, 225 × 154 mm. British Museum, London. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.

“Real” giants and dwarfs were also to be seen on display at trade fairs and in taverns and appeared “for inspection at the private residences of the wealthy” who paid to see them.<sup>76</sup> Because dwarfs were so prolific in the courts and in public festivals and pageants, initially it seems to have been those dwarf individuals who were particularly deformed who were exhibited. A broadsheet issued in 1585 shows the dwarf Re Picino (King Tiny), seated upon a table amid foodstuffs and wine with his shriveled legs drawn up beneath him, the accompanying inscription giving his height and age and indicating that he is very entertaining (figure I.6).<sup>77</sup> By the late seventeenth

<sup>76</sup> Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 303.

<sup>77</sup> Re Picino serves as a cogent example of a dwarf who would justifiably be considered “disabled” by today’s standards, his atrophied legs suggesting he was incapable of even walking. Although disability scholarship tends to treat dwarfs in the historical collective under the broader “disability” mantle, this approach does not necessarily accord with the dwarf’s lived experience in medieval and early modern Europe—nor with how they were typically portrayed in art, literature, and contemporary accounts. The notion that their physical differences rendered them socially impaired, and thus “disabled,” overlooks the commonplace experience of life in

century, the situation for dwarfs had changed, with extreme deformity no longer the overarching criterion for their display.<sup>78</sup> Visiting London in 1688 the thirty-one-inch-tall Swiss dwarf Hans Worrenbergh (John Wormburg), a proportionate dwarf, was “carried about in a box” as noted by the diarist John Evelyn, and was apparently such a hit he was depicted in a number of prints by Dutch and English artists.<sup>79</sup>

Giants, both male and female, were likewise a popular draw. Evelyn also reported on the Leipzig fair in 1668 where he saw the giantess Gertraut Chrisutte who was “6 foote 10 inches hight” and had allowed Samuel Pepys to stand under her arm.<sup>80</sup> Several decades later the Irish giant Cornelius McGrath had himself exhibited in his native Cork before moving on to London, Paris, and other cities in Europe.<sup>81</sup> He was subsequently depicted by the Venetian artist Pietro Longhi, who portrayed him doing the standard giant’s act, extending his arm to allow people to stand beneath it and thus insinuate his size; a notice tacked to the wall provides information on the “True portrait of the Irish Giant.”<sup>82</sup> Upon McGrath’s death in 1760, his entire skeleton was put on display in Trinity College, heralding the new trend in collecting.<sup>83</sup>

that epoch. As Henri-Jacques Stiker observes, “normality was a hodgepodge, and no one was concerned with segregation, for it was natural that there should be malformations” (*History of Disability*, 65). Duly relevant here are Véronique Dasen’s cautionary words: “[t]he study of short-statured persons in Antiquity can serve as a warning to our tendency to project a modern notion of disability onto past societies”; *“Infirmitas or Not?”* 29. I address this issue head-on in O’Brian, “Able-bodied and Disabled Dwarfs in Italian Renaissance Art and Culture,” with attention to Re Picino at 174–75. And see next note, with further remarks below.

78 That said, extremely deformed dwarfs and giants were still to be seen, such as the dwarf Matthew Buchinger (1674–1740), who lacked hands, legs, and feet, but who could nevertheless do “miraculous actions,” and the German giantess “without hands or feet who could sew, thread needles, spin fine threads, fire pistols, and perform other feats”; recounted in Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 287–300, and 128–29.

79 Evelyn’s description appeared in *Discourse of Medals*, in which he proposed that prodigious and freakish people should have medals struck in their honor to keep alive their memory (277). Also see the account in Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 302–4, who provides the names of the artists who depicted Hans Worrenbergh. Several prints are housed in the Rijksmuseum. Ironically, the box used as part of the dwarf’s act ended up being his undoing when it fell into the river at Rotterdam and he drowned in 1695.

80 Katritzky, *Healing, Performance and Ceremony*, 110.

81 See Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 152–56.

82 Now in the Ca’ Rezzonico in Venice, the painting (1760) was commissioned by the patrician Giovanni Grimani, indicative of how the vogue for images of carnivalesque novelties was embraced by the aristocratic classes.

83 See Cunningham, “Skeleton of the Irish Giant,” 556. After the death of the seven-foot, seven-inch Irish giant known as Charles Byrne in 1783, his skeleton was added to the anatomical



Figure 1.7 Jacob Gole, *Kleene Jannetie, a Dwarf Aged 46 and Lange Jacob, a Giant Aged 40*, late seventeenth century. Mezzotint, 24.9 × 18.6 cm. Wellcome Collection, London. Artwork in the public domain.

Better yet and for optimal effect, living giants and dwarfs were exhibited together. Writing in his *Chronicle of England*, John Stow recorded his observations about having seen in London in 1581 “two Dutchmen of strange statures, the one in height seven foote and seven inches ... The other was in height but three foote.”<sup>84</sup> Although the dwarf had greatly deformed limbs, he could sing and dance, play the trumpet, “and drink every day ten quarts of the best beer when he could get it.”<sup>85</sup> More striking was the dwarf and giant married couple who appeared together and who were depicted by the Dutch artist Jacob Gole (who had also portrayed the dwarf Hans Worrenbergh with the giant James Hansen) in a mezzotint done at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>86</sup> The image shows an elegantly dressed female dwarf holding up

collection of a surgeon whose specimens were subsequently housed in the museum associated with the College of Surgeons in London. Also see Rabanser’s discussion in chapter 5.

84 Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 271–72.

85 Ibid.

86 Gole’s mezzotint of Hans with the giant is in the Rijksmuseum. The married giant and dwarf couple were further immortalized in a short poem by the Dutch scholar Ludolph Smids in his *Poësy*, 158 (published in 1694).



a fan and standing on a stage-like setting next to an equally fashionably dressed giant, the accompanying inscription identifying them as Kleene [Little] Jannetie van Waddingsveen (age 46) and Lange [Tall] Jacob van Sneek (age 40) (figure I.7). Displaying neither extreme physical abnormalities nor an exceptional miniature size, Jannetie's appearance here seems to have been predicated by her unlikely gigantic spouse.

## Giants and Dwarfs as Monsters

In his satirical *La zucca* (The Gourd, 1551–52) the Italian satirist Anton Francesco Doni commented on the contemporary obsession with giants and dwarfs, writing “Think of us men as we run to see a Giant, a Dwarf in a bag, a monster (*mostruoso*).”<sup>87</sup> Notable is Doni's use of the word “monster,” which he employs as distinct from “giant” and “dwarf.” Deriving from the Latin *monstrum* (a divine portent) and from the Italian *monere* (to warn), the word was duly related to the verb *monstrare* (to show or reveal), with *monstrum* thus tied to the notion of display. Although dwarfs in their conflation with pygmies were traditionally part of the monstrous races, the “monster” terminology as applied to dwarfs did not really enter popular usage until after the mid-sixteenth century, and even then, rather erratically. In 1548 at the Accademia Fiorentina, Benedetto Varchi had given an influential lecture on the origins of monsters, in which he distinguished proportionate from disproportionate dwarfs with their “curved and twisted” bodies; the latter he included together with the blind, the lame, the maimed, and the like, referring to them all as counterfeits of nature (*contrafatti da natura*) and monsters (*mostri*).<sup>88</sup> Ambroise Paré picked up some of these same ideas in his *Des monstres et prodiges* (On Monsters and Marvels) of 1573, casting dwarfs together with other deformities as monsters that “appear outside the course of Nature (and are most often, signs of some misfortune to come [...]).”<sup>89</sup> The emphasis on the dwarf's exceptional deformity rather than simply his dwarfish stature seems to have been the rationale for including the illustration of Re Picino in Giovanni Battista de' Cavalieri's 1585 treatise on monsters, the accompanying inscription referring to the dwarf as *questo*

87 “[...] pensate di noi huomini come correriamo à vedere un Gigante, un Nano in una borsa, un mostruoso”; Doni, *La zucca*, 72v.

88 Varchi's lectures were published in 1560 under the title *La prima delle lezioni*, 111r, 98v; and see O'Bryan, “Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf,” 86.

89 “[...] outre le cours de Nature (& sont le plus souvent signes de quelque mal-heur à advenir [...]); in Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges*, 3.

*monstro* (this monster).<sup>90</sup> That monstrous features were intrinsically related to display was later explained by John (Giovanni) Florio in his *Dictionarie of the Italian and English Language* of 1611: “*Móstro*, shewed, set to view, demonstrated, declared. Also a monster, or misshapen creature, any thing against the course of nature, a monstrous figure, a strange sight.”<sup>91</sup>

While Florio’s definition seems to lay stress on extreme deformity, by 1642 the cultural landscape for even proportionate dwarfs had changed as indicated by the inclusion of Cospi’s dwarfs Sebastiano and Angelica Biavati, as well as the miniature Michael Magnanus, in Ulisse Aldrovandi’s *Monstrorum historia* (History of Monsters).<sup>92</sup> Notably in this compilation of real and imagined monsters, Magnanus’s image (see figure 8.4) appears in the section with the recently discovered “*Gigantes Amercae*” from Patagonia and the pygmies, with the book also containing illustrations of satyrs, cyclops, cynocephali, centaurs, androgynes, and hirsutes.<sup>93</sup> In his philological treatise *Novum organum philologicum* from 1674, the German polymath Johann Joachim Becher went on to group the Italian and German terms for dwarfs and giants—*nani* and *gigantes*, and *Zwergen* and *Riesen*—together in his list of other words comprising *monstra hominum* (human monsters).<sup>94</sup> This categorization notwithstanding, despite the commonplace associations of the “monster” terminology, it is important to note that it did not originally have the full pejorative implications later assigned to the word, much like the term “grotesque.”

90 Cavalieri’s treatise was entitled *Opera nella quale vie molti mostri de tutte le parti del mondo antichi et moderni* (Monsters from all parts of the ancient and modern world).

91 Florio, *Dictionarie*, 324.

92 Although Aldrovandi had died in 1605, the work was completed by his assistant who added the information on the dwarfs. Sebastiano’s and Angelica’s full-page illustrations appear in *Monstrorum historia*, 603 and 604, with the description referring to the “elegant proportions of their parts” (602). The illustration of Sebastiano evidently served as the model for the fresco painted in 1650–74 for a palace in Florence, which shows the dwarf in a similar pose and dress, accompanied by a dog; see [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cerchia\\_di\\_Baccio\\_del\\_Bianco,\\_ritratto\\_del\\_nano\\_sebastiano\\_del\\_cav\\_ferdinando\\_cospi\\_1650-75\\_ca.\\_con\\_ridipinture\\_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cerchia_di_Baccio_del_Bianco,_ritratto_del_nano_sebastiano_del_cav_ferdinando_cospi_1650-75_ca._con_ridipinture_02.jpg).

93 Magnanus is discussed and illustrated with the Patagonian giants in Aldrovandi, *Monstrorum historia*, 35–40; also see chapter 8 of this volume. The illustration of the giants was based on imagery in a map of 1576 which depicted a giant family identified as “the giants called Patagones [...] nine or ten feet or more in height.” As Davies has shown, this set out the idea that they were from a race of giants rather than individual monstrous births such as appeared in Europe; see discussion in *Renaissance Ethnography*, 167–70 and her fig. 5.5.

94 Becher, *Novum organum*, 171. Becher’s book was the type of universal nomenclator popular in the seventeenth century, which assembled groups of synonyms in Latin and German, arranged in word classes according to Aristotelian categories.

## Dwarfs and Giants In and As Architecture

The period enthusiasm for giants and dwarfs was reflected in architectural structures that invoked the giant or dwarf nomenclature in their title or conception. In Vienna, during excavation work at the cathedral of St. Stephan in 1443, the discovery of a thighbone of a mammoth, but believed to be that of a giant, was subsequently installed over the entrance into the church, with the portal henceforth referred to as the Riesentor (Giant's Door).<sup>95</sup> In Padua, a room decorated with frescoes of famous rulers and personages from antiquity, all shown life-size, formed part of the Sala Virorum Illustrium (Room of Famous Men), whose name was later changed to the Sala dei Giganti, the name also given to the room housing Giulio Romano's fresco of imaginary giants in the Mantuan Palazzo del Te. Also in Mantua, a suite of small-scale rooms constructed in the Palazzo Ducale in 1615 was later dubbed the *appartamento dei nani* (apartment of dwarfs), coined no doubt because of the legendary reputation of the Gonzaga dwarfs residing in the palace.<sup>96</sup> In actuality, the complex was built as a small-scale reproduction of the Scala Santa (Holy Stairs) and the catacombs in Rome, meant not for dwarfs, but as a place of devotion. Michelangelo substituted a female dwarf for a putto, using her in the service of clever architectural parodies in his Sistine Chapel frescoes (1508–12) painted for Pope Julius II. Presenting her in the guise of a caryatid and an atlantid, he showed the dwarf supporting a placard and the platform upon which the gargantuan figure of Jeremiah is seated above her, the juxtaposition evoking the giant-dwarf coupling (figure I.8).<sup>97</sup> On the opposite wall Michelangelo rendered the Cumaen Sybil as an "ancient giantess with swollen breasts" to represent Mother Church, another architectural metaphor that implicitly pays homage to the giant-dwarf topos.<sup>98</sup> That the giant was evoked in this architectural sense was certainly fitting given that giants were portrayed as builders and architects in legend and literature.<sup>99</sup>

95 Avanzini and Kustatscher, "Giganti di pietra," 26–27.

96 In his 1993 article, "I Nani non abitano più qui," Venturi dispelled the tradition that the complex had served as the dwarfs' apartment. The nomenclature *appartamento dei nani* evidently only came into fashion in the eighteenth century.

97 O'Bryan, "Michelangelo's Sistine Dwarf," 72–73. In this she bears a resemblance in function to the female giant depicted in the medieval church of St. Jakob in Kastelaz, who with her male counterpart is depicted as an atlas; see Pinkus, "ein rise starc," 347 and his figure 1.9 in chapter 1 of this volume.

98 Dotson, "Augustinian Interpretation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling," 413, paraphrasing Wind, "Michelangelo's Prophets and Sibyls," 68–70.

99 Cyclops or giants were reputed to have built the complexes at Tiryns and Mycenae, with giants portrayed as architects in one version of the Tristan chivalric romance; for the latter see Pinkus, "Giant of Bremen," 408–9. Also see Ozeri's essay in chapter 2 and her figure 2.3.



Figure 1.8 Giorgio Ghisi, after Michelangelo, *Jeremiah, Boaz, and Aminadab*, 1570–75. Engraving, 22  $\frac{1}{4}$   $\times$  17 in. (56.5  $\times$  43.2 cm). The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1984, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in the public domain.

## Issues of Gender

Michelangelo's fresco is unusual for depicting a female dwarf—and a female giant if we consider the Cumaen Sybil—genders that were typically rendered in period imagery with much less frequency than their male counterparts.<sup>100</sup> (Equally unusual was showing the female dwarf with characteristics of both a caryatid and an atlantid, which essentially renders her androgynous, although androgyny is duly suggested in the depiction of one of the giantesses shown in figure 1.3).<sup>101</sup> Female dwarfs as known entities appeared as companions in period portraiture especially after the mid-fifteenth century, but only rarely by themselves; as generic figures, however, they did not really come into their own until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>102</sup> Then they became popular subjects in paintings,

<sup>100</sup> For example, of the 300 dwarfs I have identified in my study of dwarfs in Italian Renaissance art from the mid-fourteenth to early seventeenth centuries, fewer than fifteen are female.

<sup>101</sup> Pinkus discusses the androgynous cast given to the giantess in chapter 1. Androgynes were also represented in Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum historia*.

<sup>102</sup> Ravenscroft and McBryde treat female court dwarfs in chapters 7 and 9 respectively. One notable exception of a singular portrait of a female dwarf is that by Niccolò Cassana, who in the early eighteenth century portrayed the dwarf Angiola Biondi in the service of Violante of

prints, porcelain figurines, and small garden statues based upon the *gobbi* (hunchback dwarfs) made famous in Jacques Callot's caricatured print series of 1616. In literature, female dwarfs had been cast as characters in the romances, with the singular motif attracting the attention of Italian writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who composed burlesque poems about imaginary and real dwarf personages.<sup>103</sup> Giantesses were also part of the romance tradition, but despite their portrayal in late medieval Tyrolean frescoes (as in figure 1.9) and their popularity as fabricated effigies in civic festivities, in early modern imagery they were few and far between.<sup>104</sup> Portraits of actual female giants were even rarer, although we may consider as a portrait the rudimentary colored sketch of the seven-foot-tall Irish giantess who had appeared in London in 1696.<sup>105</sup> And in a variation on the male giant-dwarf pairing from the chivalric tradition, the English playwright Thomas Killigrew made a female giant and a female dwarf the characters in his comedy *Thomaso, or the Wanderer* (ca. 1652–54). The story line follows two courtiers who marry the giantess and the dwarf, both wealthy, only to later lose their wives' dowries.<sup>106</sup>

## Caricature and Parody

The humorous fashion in which dwarfs and giants were portrayed in chivalric spoofs, burlesque poetry, and farcical stage plays found perfect expression

Bavaria, wife of Grand Prince Ferdinando de' Medici (r. 1670–1713). The portrait is illustrated in Biscaglia, Ceriana, and Mammana, *Buffoni, villani e giocatori*, cat. 11. A number of generic female dwarfs appear in works by the Brescian artist Faustino Bocchi (1659–1742), who specialized in paintings of miniaturized dwarfs shown in a variety of bizarre scenarios.

103 On the female dwarfs in the romances, see Harward, *Dwarfs of the Arthurian Romances*, 85 n. 10. Burlesque poetry was a literary genre that mocked its subjects. Among the Italian burlesque poets writing about female dwarfs were Luigi Tansillo, Torquato Tasso, and Giovan Leone Sempronio, whose works are included in Crimi and Spila, *Nanerie*, 82–112, 124. As the authors note, the seventeenth century experienced a "gusto" for female dwarfs; *ibid.*, 124 n. 1.

104 On giantesses in the romances see Huot, *Outsiders*, 96–97, 136–37, *passim*; Pinkus, "ein rise starc unde grôz;" and his discussion in chapter 1 of this volume. Pieter Bruegel portrayed a legendary giantess in his *Dulle Griet* (Mad Meg) from 1563, which shows a monstrous woman in a hellish landscape, the imagery inspired by Flemish folklore; see Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter*, 124–44.

105 The Irish giant appears in James Paris's "Short History of Human Prodigies." Paris's unpublished manuscript (which also contains an illustration of Hans Worrenbergh and his "carrying case") is housed in the British Library (BL Sloane MS. 5246).

106 See discussion by Vander Motten, "Thomas Killigrew," 143.



Figure I.9 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Caricature of a Court Dwarf*, ca. 1660s. Pen and brown ink, 5  $\frac{1}{8}$   $\times$  4  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (12.9  $\times$  10.4 cm). Purchase, Alain and Marie-Christine van den Broek d'Obrenan Gift, 2008. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in the public domain.

in the burgeoning field of caricature.<sup>107</sup> In a sense, the fabricated giants and dwarfs featuring in festivals functioned like caricatures when parts of their anatomy were exaggerated or distorted, like the impossible proportions assigned Monsieur Gayant or the gigantic heads placed on the dwarf-like *cabezudos*. Following the lead of the Carracci family of painters who operated an innovative art school in Bologna in the late sixteenth century, a number of Italian artists made caricatures of dwarfs a specialty of their graphic output. Although better known for his impressive sculpture and architecture, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1589–1680) produced a caricature of a court dwarf, placing an oversized head on a tiny body, rendering an effect not unlike the Spanish *cabezudos* (figure I.9).<sup>108</sup> While artists poked fun at contemporary personages by portraying them in the form of dwarfs or giants, others used the parodic dwarf and giant label as an effective means of disparagement. Martin Luther mocked Pope Leo X as a “mighty giant Roland,” with Shakespeare invoking a

<sup>107</sup> The standard definition of caricature is when a subject’s distinctive or peculiar features are exaggerated or distorted to produce a comic effect.

<sup>108</sup> The dwarf was probably affiliated with a French or Italian court according to McPhee and Orenstein, *Infinite Jest*, 42. Bernini is also credited with having stimulated the use of caricature for contemporary personages, including popes and cardinals, which may be why the Metropolitan Museum of Art (which holds the drawing) entitles it *Caricature of a Man Pointing*. Sandra Cheng, however, questions whether the drawing is indeed by Bernini (private communication).

slew of “tiny” epithets in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>109</sup> In one episode the character Lysander castigates Hermia, telling her “Get you gone, you dwarf; You minimus, of hind'ring knot-grass made, You bead, you acorn!”<sup>110</sup> It is notable that Lysander's insult was leveled at a female character, the usage here suggesting that Shakespeare was perhaps playing into the contemporary Italian trend for making female dwarfs the focus of their burlesque poetry.

## Giants and Dwarfs as Apotropaia

Evocative of their function as court sentries, giants taking the form of colossal sculptures were stationed at points of entry into cities or on the exterior of buildings where they often served an apotropaic purpose.<sup>111</sup> This was the role assigned the Roland statues that were prominently displayed throughout German-speaking lands in the late medieval and early modern era, the oversized effigies acting as “living protecting giants.”<sup>112</sup> A similar protective function accompanies the giant *Argos* (1490–92) depicted in a fresco in the Sforza *castello* in Milan.<sup>113</sup> Attributed to Bramantino, the over life-sized image appears in an area of the palace that housed the treasury, the women's apartments, and an adjacent chamber that served as a “birthing room,” where Duke Ludovico il Moro Sforza (r. 1494–99) displayed his wife and newborn son. In view of this latter arrangement, and consonant with the apotropaic powers ascribed to giants in statuary, it would seem to be a striking example of a male giant assigned a protective role in a related feminine context, particularly one having to do with childbirth which was historically the dominion of dwarfs.<sup>114</sup>

109 On Luther, see Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 257.

110 Lysander addressing Hermia, in act 3, scene 2. Reminiscent of the sobriquet later given to Jeffrey Hudson, “minimus” means something tiny and/or insignificant, with “knot-grass” referring to a weed that was believed to hinder growth; “bead” and “acorn” speak for themselves.

111 For the entries of Philip II and then Elizabeth into London, the Temple Bar (the official entrance into the city) featured twin giants, “palladia [which] stood in apotropaic defiance”; Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London*, 251.

112 Pinkus addresses the apotropaic function of the Roland statues in “Giant of Bremen,” 391.

113 See discussion by Welch, *Art and Authority in Milan*, 223–29 and her fig. 122.

114 In Egyptian tradition, for example, the dwarf Bes served as a protector of women and childbirth; see Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, 67 ff; and O'Bryan, “Medici Pope,” 597. The inclusion of a dwarf on a fourteenth-century Italian birth tray (*desco da parte*) may also point to an apotropaic function; see image at: <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/the-garden-of-love-birth-tray-painting-attributed-to-andrea-news-photo/587491130>. Also see McBryde's discussion in chapter 9 below.



Figure I.10 Andrea Mantegna, detail with dwarf from *Court Scene*, 1465–74. Fresco, Camera Picta (Camera degli Sposi), Palazzo Ducale, Mantua. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

As for dwarfs, because of their bodily deformations, in ancient tradition they were seen to be naturally apotropaic, but when they were portrayed with an obscene detail and/or comic feature their prophylactic powers were magnified. Such images speak to the tradition of *baskania* (laughable things), sculptures of deformed beings that were used to repel malignant forces. In the ducal palace in Mantua, we see this played out pictorially in Andrea Mantegna's fresco (1465–74) of Ludovico Gonzaga and his family accompanied by a female dwarf, one of the dwarfs in residence (figure I.10).<sup>115</sup> Notably, the dwarf has been situated directly over the fireplace, of significance since openings into the home were believed to be the most conducive to the entry of evil spirits. More to the point, she is the only person in the entire figural grouping to engage the audience with her gaze, which together with the obscene gesture, allowed her to deflect the Evil

<sup>115</sup> She has been identified as either Antonia *nana* or Lucia *nana*; Signorini, *Opus hoc tenue*, 286 n. 123.



Eye (*malocchio*) cast by those in Ludovico's audience who wished to do the family harm.<sup>116</sup> In the Sala di Costantino the dwarf's grinning expression and emphasized genitalia served a similar apotropaic function (see again figure 1.3), of special importance for the superstitious Medici pope.<sup>117</sup> As with the magical attributes assigned to giants and dwarfs in the chivalric romances, their perceived supernatural powers often spilled over into real life.<sup>118</sup>

## Shared Characteristics and Symbolism

As well as being endowed with apotropaic properties, giants and dwarfs were accorded similar characteristics and symbolic values—both positive and negative—which often served to conflate them in the period mindset despite their pronounced disparities in size. In their association with the monstrous races, both were alternately viewed as stupid and savage, aligned with troglodytes, animals, and the wild man, and assigned appropriate libidinous qualities.<sup>119</sup> Giants and dwarfs might also be perceived as intrinsically evil. In Cesare Ripa's emblem book of 1603 (*Iconologia*), one illustration shows the dwarf with a hydra—a pairing that evokes the heroic Hercules battling the hydra as one of his seven Labors—but with the “disproportionate dwarf”

116 It was believed that the *malocchio* could be cast by the *jettatore* onto the figures represented in the imagery, thus necessitating apotropaic intervention. The dwarf's gesture of inserting her forefinger into a closed fist is a symbol for fornication; see discussion in O'Bryan, “Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight,” 258–59.

117 See O'Bryan, “Medici Pope,” 599.

118 Sometimes the giant's and dwarf's powers overlapped, such as in the Laurin epic where the eponymous dwarf king wore a magical belt that gave him the strength of a giant and led to his victories in battle; see Pinkus, “Giant of Bremen,” 418.

119 For example, Aristotle referred to pygmies as troglodytes living in caves, with Pliny and Isidore of Seville duly referring to giants as troglodytes; see, respectively, Tyson, *Pygmies of the Ancients*, 32, and Husband, *Wild Man*, 43. In the thirteenth century, Albertus Magnus likened pygmies to apes, seeing them as man-like creatures distinct from other animals (O'Bryan, “Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight,” 275), while a century later Jacopo della Lana invoked whales and elephants in referring to the giant's strength (discussed by Ozeri in chapter 2). Like the wild men, giants and dwarfs were given to having unbridled sexual appetites. A number of ancient apotropaic statuettes showed dwarfs with oversized phalluses, which contributed to later beliefs about their sexual apparatus and carnal proclivities. For examples housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art see: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/257558>, and <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/246687>. Giants were likewise renowned for their voracious sexual appetites, which often extended to violence. I touch upon the dwarf's sexuality in Italian Renaissance art in O'Bryan, “Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight,” 274–75, but for examples of the giant's carnal nature as expressed in medieval literature, see Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*.



Figure 1.11 Cesare Ripa, "Vicio" (Vice), illustration in *Iconologia*, 1603. Artwork in the public domain.

(*Nano sproportionato*) as the accompanying explanation tells us, now used as an emblem for Vice and Wickedness (figure 1.11).<sup>120</sup> Giants especially were ascribed unimaginable acts of cruelty in the popular literary imagination. The Arthurian tale of the Spanish giant who raped and then consumed the Duchess of Brittany pays homage to the giant's reputation as a cannibalistic devourer.<sup>121</sup> A similar idea was conveyed, if not whimsically, in the sixteenth-

120 "Un Nano sproportionato, guercio, di carnaggione bruna, di pelo rosso, & che abbracci un'Hidra"; Ripa, *Iconologia*, 443. Several decades later Pietro Liberi used a court dwarf to represent one of the vices in his moralistic painting from the 1660s of a man felled by lust, wine, and gambling. The painting, which is now in the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice, shows the dwarf holding up a pack of cards to represent gambling (a popular Venetian pastime) as he places a kick at the fallen man's crotch. Findlen discusses the iconography in "Humanism, Politics and Pornography," 49–51.

121 The tale appears in Wace's *Roman de Brut* (mid-fourteenth century), the earliest surviving chronicle of British history composed in Norman French, and named after Brutus, the legendary founder and first king of Britain. The work is housed in the British Library (BL Egerton MS 3028), with fol. 49 showing the giant roasting a pig, as the duchess's blood drips from the giant's mouth; see discussion by Sandidge, "Gawain, Giants, and Tennis," 484.

century garden of Bomarzo in Italy which features a huge structure of a disembodied giant's head, its open mouth "devouring" all those who enter within.<sup>122</sup> On a more benign level, the giant's reputation for gluttony had special resonance for the Medici dwarf Morgante, his pronounced obesity offering cogent evidence that this giant of a dwarf was also a glutton.

Literary works duly portrayed giants and dwarfs with interchangeable character traits. While the chivalric romance genre depicted the two as villains in their battles with valorous knights, they were also cast as lovers to damsels and as valiant knights themselves: "Jayant Chevalier" (Giant Knight) and "Petit Chevalier" (Little Knight) were two notable characters. The close relationships between giants and dwarfs expressed in literature was further extended to ascribed genealogical connections. Rabelais gives a hint of this in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in which "fifty three thousand little men, ill-favoured dwarves" and as many "little women" are "birthed" from Pantagruel's flatulence.<sup>123</sup> As well as the dwarf named Wealth who claimed descent from the giant Gog Magog and the giantess with gargantuan sexual organs in *The Crying of ane Playe*, in the prose romance *Conte du Papegau* (Tale of the Parrot) the character Jayant sans Nom (Giant without a Name) is presented as the son of a regular-sized woman and a dwarf who served as the personal valet to a knight.<sup>124</sup> Imagery, too, sometimes conflated aspects of giants and dwarfs. In Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* of 1544, which offered a description of the world, among the woodcuts illustrating creatures from the monstrous races was a pygmy with two heads, the latter a feature taken from the double-headed giants who were regularly depicted in illustrations of the medieval marvels.<sup>125</sup>

Giants and dwarfs were assigned even footing in the dialectic used to reinforce ideas on Virtue versus Vice, a common theme of princely education. In Nicole Oresme's translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* produced around 1370 for the French king Charles V (r. 1364–80), one illustration shows a dwarf standing next to a giant, with the accompanying explanation identifying the duo as the "two evils or vices, one of which is conditioned by excess and the other by deficiency," since they are "too large or too small in proportion to the mean, personified by Vertu" (Virtue).<sup>126</sup> In the Tyrolean region where giants were a veritable cultural phenomenon, over two

122 Morgan refers to this as a "Hell's Mouth," in *Monster in the Garden*, 134.

123 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. Urquhart and Le Motteux, book 2, 2. XXVII, 308.

124 On Jayant sans Nom, see Huot, *Outsiders*, 44, 50–51.

125 Wittkower, "Marvels of the East," 183–84, with illustration at 46 h.

126 Specifically, the giant represents Excess (*Superhabondance*) and the dwarf Deficiency (*Deffaute*); Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle*, 67, with illustrations by the Jean de Sy Master at 63–65.

centuries later the physician and polymath Hippolytus Guarinonius invoked a similar analogous pairing in his *Die Grewel der Verwüstung menschlichen Geschlechts* (The Abominations of the Desolation of the Human Race) of 1610. Asserting that dwarfs and giants were “far beneath” and “far above” the correct size respectively, he advocated that “nature becomes more noble and pure, the more it rids itself of this type of vermin, of which we should wish to have less.”<sup>127</sup> The French physician Charles Patin went on to echo this revulsion after having seen the portrait of the giant and dwarf (figure 11.7) in the palace of Archduke Ferdinand II. As he recorded in his travelogue published in 1690s, “Their Imperial Majesties likewise maintain some of these Giants and Dwarfs in their Court, whom I cou’d never behold without a kind of Horror, in regard that they are so far from the ordinary proportion and size of other Men.”<sup>128</sup> Given the continued popularity of giants and dwarfs in the public sphere, Guarinonius’s and Patin’s views strike a somewhat discordant note, but period thinkers found philosophical justification for Nature’s creation of these extremes in human scale. In his *De Pygmaeis* of 1628, the Danish physician and theologian Caspar Bartholin had asked why man “not [also] be given to deficiency, especially given the excessive magnitude of Giants?,” maintaining that the two were united by the web of harmonious relationships.<sup>129</sup>

Bartholin’s words in turn suggest that despite the most insidious ideas about giants and dwarfs that made them emblematic of iniquity, they could nevertheless be worthy of salvation. This was certainly the message of some of the literary depictions of giants such as Pulci’s Morgante, who, although formerly monstrous, became a “good giant” after being baptized.<sup>130</sup> A similar idea was played out in the *Conte du Papegau*, when King Arthur has the rustic simpleton giant (Jayant sans Nom) baptized, with the giant then becoming a knight and integrating into chivalric society.<sup>131</sup> Despite being portrayed as enemies of the faith in scenes of Christian martyrdom and Christ’s Passion, in Italian imagery dwarfs were popularly represented as attendants to the Magi, which intrinsically bestowed upon them a more favorable religious affiliation particularly when they were situated near the Holy Family. The most cogent visual expression of the dwarf’s possibilities for spiritual rebirth is the mid-fourteenth-century tympanum relief of Pietro Nano depicted as

127 Guarinonius, *Die Grewel*, 49; cited and translated in Katritzky, *Healing, Performance and Ceremony*, 202.

128 Patin, *Travels thro’ Germany*, 84.

129 Quoted in Findlen, “Jokes of Nature,” 310.

130 Stephens, *Giants in those Days*, 66.

131 Huot, *Outsiders*, 57.



Figure I.12 Andriolo de Santi, *Pietro Nano da Marano with Virgin and Saints Francis and Lawrence*, ca. 1344. Tympanum, San Lorenzo, Vicenza. Photo: Robin O'Bryan.

a humble penitent above the entrance into the grand church of San Lorenzo in Vicenza.<sup>132</sup> The sculptor showed the dwarf's truncated body in close proximity to the Virgin and Child and with St. Lawrence holding his hand over Pietro's head in an intercessory nod to his salvation, of necessity to overcome his sin of usury (figure I.12).<sup>133</sup> Of course, there were also actual dwarf individuals who had opted for the religious way of life, their vocation offering clear indication that they were worthy of redemption despite the insidious connotations accorded them in the collective.

### Giants and Dwarfs in Period Rhetoric: Connections and Conflations

While assigning dwarfs and giants similar attributes and symbolic values, contemporary rhetoric implicitly acknowledged the connection, if not conflation, between the two—usage that again indicates how pervasive

<sup>132</sup> On Pietro Nano, see discussion by Carlotto, "Pietro 'Nan' da Marano," and Moskowitz, "Inversion of Viewpoint."

<sup>133</sup> The inclusion of St. Lawrence here is significant since his intercession was believed to free souls from purgatory.

giant/dwarf invocations were in popular discourse. Sometimes this linkage was expressed in deference to the dwarf(s) being especially wonderful specimens of human form, as when Grand Duchess Bianca Cappello's agent advised her of the two dwarf *gigantesse* that were available for her adoption.<sup>134</sup> The parallel was duly applied by Tommaso Garzoni in his *La piazza universal di tutte le professioni del mondo* (The Universal Piazza of All the Professions of the World, first published 1585) allowing that the *zoccoli*, the high platform shoes worn by Venetian ladies, made them look like "dwarfs converted into giants" (*nane convertite in gigantesche*).<sup>135</sup> Killigrew drew on the contemporary conceit in his *Thomaso*, with one character commenting that "Those of excellent virtue, which make a Dwarf a Gyant, or Gyantize a Dwarf."<sup>136</sup> In his travelogue on Italy published in 1670, Richard Lassels used the rhetorical metaphor in relation to architecture, noting that since he had described St. Peter's as the "greatest Church in Rome," he felt obliged to say something about the tiny, overlooked Church of Santo Ildefonso, the "least church in Rome," justifying its mention because "dwarfs are men as well as Gyants."<sup>137</sup> The giant-dwarf conflation might also be hinted at. A broadsheet produced in Germany around 1560 depicts the dwarf Wendel Berthold as a drummer, the text below the image reading: "Is not that a dapper hero / See how he stands like this, As if he were nine times as tall [...]."<sup>138</sup> Considering then the gargantuan proportions of Giambologna's *Appennino* (see again figure I.5)—which Luke Morgan has described as "a miniaturization of the mountain range"—we may see this massive metaphorical man functioning as both a *gigantissimo nano* and a *nanissimo gigante*!<sup>139</sup>

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Since Wood's monumental study, much has been written about giants and dwarfs, both as a combined topic of investigation as well as individual foci of scholarly attention.<sup>140</sup> The eleven essays in this collection treat the

134 ASF, MdP 5928, fol. 106, letter from Alberto Bolognetti to Bianca Cappello, dated February 2, 1582. This usage speaks to the ancient tradition of antiphrasis, a play on words where an antithetical meaning was employed for ironic effect.

135 Garzoni, *La piazza universal*, 839.

136 Killigrew, *Thomaso*, 450.

137 Lassels, *Voyage of Italy*, 183–84.

138 The broadsheet is housed in the British Museum.

139 Morgan, *Monster in the Garden*, 118.

140 Although I am not enumerating here the studies that have been undertaken since Wood produced his seminal work (many of which are cited in the bibliographies accompanying each chapter of this volume), it is worth noting that his text was followed by treatments in French,

subject afresh, offering new perspectives and innovative readings, some that challenge previously held notions about the topics under review. Divided into two geographical sections, Part I deals with the Northern regions comprising Austria, Germany, the Low Countries, England, and Scotland, with Part II examining the traditions in Spain and especially Italy, a division that implicitly acknowledges the differences in how variant geographical areas responded to giants and dwarfs as a cultural phenomenon. Within this framework, scholars tackle the topos from methodologies extending to iconographic and literary analysis, connoisseurship, social and feminist history, and disability studies and aesthetics. Some essayists discuss the “real” dwarfs and giants residing in the royal and princely courts, providing biographical details that reveal special relationships with their patrons and that were often reflected in imagery and contemporary writings. Other chapters focus on giants as imagined and metaphorical figures, cast as legendary heroes encapsulated in regional and dynastic histories, taking the form of fabricated festival figures appearing in courtly and public celebratory events, or portrayed in colossal statuary and over life-sized imagery. Still other discussions veer toward the grotesque, viewing dwarfs and giants vis-à-vis the period interest in collections of human deformities, caricature, and the burlesque. A number of related issues are brought into play, not only those involving identity, prestige, politics, and religion, but also subtexts that bear on gender, satire, magic, and the monstrous Other.

The first two chapters deal with depictions of imaginary giants in the Tyrol where legend and myth had established was the site of their origins; both, moreover, consider the positive connotations accorded giants rather than focusing solely on the nefarious attributes traditionally assigned them in the literature. In the opening essay, Assaf Pinkus examines a late medieval fresco cycle painted on the wall of an exterior balcony of the Summer House in Schloss Runkelstein, which among other figures includes six warrior giants and giantesses, each measuring almost twelve feet tall. Placing stress on their “out-of-scale” dimensions rather than their assigned literary identities, he argues that their colossal size was not able to be accurately gauged by those standing within the narrow confines of the balcony space—nor when seen from the courtyard below—a somatic experience that was intended

Edoard Garnier's *Les nains et les géants* (1884) and Émile Lagarde's *Nains et géants* (undated, but thought have been published sometime between 1900 and 1920). In Germany, Conrad Alberti went on to use the giant and dwarf topos as a metaphor for humans' struggles with nature in his 1889 novel *Riesen und Zwerge*. His invocation is not altogether inappropriate considering how giants and dwarfs were used in the crafting of regional histories particularly concerning the creation of territorial land masses.

to induce in the beholder a sense of alienation and wonder with the giants perceived as both threatening and yet magnificent. Analyzing aspects of the giants' iconography, Pinkus shows that the males were meant to symbolize "the royal, the wild, and the pagan," with similar aspects interwoven in the depictions of the giantesses, one of which was assigned androgynous characteristics. As we learn, whereas the male giants in the literary works are sometimes converted to Christianity and achieve salvation, the giantesses are always subdued and slaughtered, which offers an interesting commentary on gender. Pinkus further posits that as liminal creatures themselves, the giants functioned as a type of political metaphor—a "visual surrogate"—for the patrons of the fresco, who were occupying a liminal position between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

In chapter 2, Michal Ozeri picks up on the redemptive connotations accorded (male) giants such as expressed in colossal depictions of St. Christopher appearing on the exteriors of churches located along pilgrimage roads in southern Tyrol. Initially represented as a cynocephalus and portrayed in literature as a "Reprebus" (or reprobate), by the mid-thirteenth century, Christopher was cast as a giant in the *Legenda aurea* (Golden Legend), offering an updated version of the evil giants in courtly literature. In effect this was an appropriate transformation since saints, like giants, were duly perceived as liminal figures. Focusing on the rural churches that feature giant images of Christopher bearing Christ on his shoulder and accompanied by a mermaid floating in a "baptismal river" by his feet, Ozeri shows that these images address the pilgrims from different directional sides of buildings so that the mountains provide an imposing backdrop. As she proposes, such visual alignments attest to medieval understandings of the sublime, a concept in philosophical aesthetics wherein art, nature, and religion united to engender awe in the viewer. Thus, in their physical and spiritual ascent, pilgrims were prompted to engage with the authority of God mediated through the gigantic image of Christopher and the sublime mountain landscape. The patron saint of travelers and pilgrims, Christopher the giant (accompanied by his mermaid "attendant") also served an apotropaic and protective function for the travelers facing the arduous journey across the Alps.

Continuing with the positive associations accorded imaginary giants, in chapter 3, Andrea Bubenik concentrates on giants portrayed as primordial ancestors in art and epic poetry in Germany, England, and the Low Countries, which were used in the creation of nationalistic myths and to establish ancestry on the part of contemporary rulers. Although the discovery of mammoth bones was questioned by some who understood



that the relics belonged to animals, Bubenik relates how period thinkers tied these remains to a pervasive belief in primordial giants. Building on literary traditions and giant lore, in her focus on Germany and England, she analyzes aspects of the medieval epic *Nibelungenlied* and Edmund Spenser's late sixteenth-century allegory *The Faerie Queene*, to show how giants were used in the service of Emperor Maximilian's and Elizabeth I's ruling strategies respectively, with Maximilian taking seriously his belief in giants and relating them to his ancestral origins. In Flanders and northern Netherlands, Bubenik brings in the giants in contemporary festivals and the megalithic *hunebedden*, which were believed to be the graves of giants and which were linked to Hercules in the Dutch popular imagination. Paying homage to Hercules as their national hero, Henrik Goltzius portrayed him as a literal giant in his engravings, his gigantic stature used as a metaphor for the nascent Dutch Republic and its battle against Spanish oppression.

In chapter 4, Giovanna Guidicini examines the positive connotations of the giant as they were ascribed to the thirteenth-century national hero Robert the Bruce, who was so important for Scottish political identity. She begins her investigation with a poem by the court poet William Dunbar, which describes the triumphal entry held in Aberdeen in 1511 for Margaret Tudor, wife of the Scottish king James IV. Significantly, in Dunbar's description of the Bruce, he used language that was evocative of contemporary descriptions of festival giants, commenting on the Bruce's awe-inspiring, powerful, and massive physique. Guidicini proposes that the Aberdonian populace deliberately portrayed Bruce in the form of a giant, building on his legendary reputation as a fearless and victorious leader in battle to signify Scottish dominance over English forces and thus impart a political message that was intended specifically for James's Tudor bride. Enumerating the possible ways in which the Bruce may have been represented, either in the form of a painting or even as a gigantic effigy such as were often to be found in contemporary festivals, Guidicini posits that the special historical relationship of the Bruce with Aberdeen made him an appropriate figure to celebrate as a giant—indeed as giant ancestors were being used to legitimize other contemporary rulers in the epoch.

Hansjörg Rabanser takes us back to the Tyrol in chapter 5, to look at the "real" giants and dwarfs associated with the Habsburg courts. Identifying the giants by name, he examines their depictions in portraits and sculpture, along with those of the dwarfs who were similarly affiliated with the Tyrolean rulers. Rabanser emphasizes the formative role played by Archduke Ferdinand II in the sixteenth century as an enthusiastic proponent of "human curiosities" who viewed giants and dwarfs as "collectibles" and

who put their portraits, memorabilia, and other objects, including alleged giants' bones, on display in his princely *Kunstkammer* at Schloss Ambras. The most famous of Ferdinand's dwarfs was certainly the proportionate dwarf Thome[r]le, whose miniature armor was exhibited alongside the giant Bona's in the castle armory and who was depicted in the rare double portrait with a giant now assumed to be Anton Fran[c]k. Numerous singular portraits of Thome[r]le were also produced, some intended for the court in Munich that was ruled by Ferdinand's uncle. This lively contact between the courts in Innsbruck and other ruling houses, especially Munich, which also lent the resident giants and dwarfs for special occasions, exchanged their portraits, or had duplicate copies made, testifies to a shared taste among the Tyrolean Habsburg rulers—whose penchant for dwarf imagery was to be picked up by the Habsburgs in Spain.

In chapter 6, Eva Seemann offers a new religious and social perspective on the institution of the German court dwarf, focusing on a dwarf in the service of Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg in the early seventeenth century. Justus Bertram was a proportionate dwarf who came into the prince-electors service in 1614 and who was regarded as an "ideal miniature" and a masterpiece of Nature. Providing insights into the dwarf's function in Johann Sigismund's court and offering details of his private life, Seemann reveals that in an unusual act of homage, the Brandenburg prince commissioned an expensive printed funeral sermon honoring the dwarf after his untimely death at the age of fourteen. While this tract followed a particular format for honoring its subject, the work was of special significance since not only did it laud the Christian values of the dwarf, but it also assigned a theological justification for the dwarfs' presence at court. This tribute to Justus Bertram proved to be influential for two other printed sermons for court dwarfs (one also of proportionate stature) in the early eighteenth century, both of whom were further acknowledged with commemorative funerary markers containing honorific inscriptions. Of special interest in Seemann's essay is the illustration of the memorial plaque made for a deceased dwarf which included his framed portrait and the inscription describing him as a "picture of virtue."

Moving from the Austrian and German courts, in chapter 7 Janet Ravenscroft treats the dwarfs in the service of the Habsburg kings in Spain, introducing issues related to disability, particularly vis-à-vis the royal family's acknowledged physical and intellectual impairments. Analyzing a corpus of three categories of portraiture—group, singular, and double portraits—Ravenscroft challenges the notion of normality to posit that both dwarfs and royal sitters were similar by virtue of their perceived physical

imperfections. In her analysis of the double portraits, Ravenscroft proposes that the position of a small figure beneath the “royal hand” is evidence that the attendant is a proportionate dwarf. Turning to Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*, she places emphasis on the female dwarf with achondroplasia, the kind of dwarfism rarely featured in Habsburg portraits, and different from the proportionate dwarfs typically shown with the royals, and such as appears next to the dwarf herself. Ravenscroft also posits a connection between this work and a little-known portrait painted by an artist in New Spain (Mexico), which shows the daughter of the viceroy of Spain accompanied by a dwarf from the indigenous Chichimec people. In this pairing, we are presented with an unusual example of a veritable monstrous Other, an effect made more pronounced by the tattoo emblazoned across the dwarf’s forehead.

In chapter 8, Robin O’Bryan examines a portrait that has been identified as the dwarf Giangiovetta, affiliated with the Farnese dukes in Parma. Painted in 1606 by Johann Gersmueter, an obscure Flemish artist, the work depicts an elegantly dressed man of apparently normal stature whose designation as a dwarf would make him one of the rare proportionate dwarfs that were so highly valued in courtly society. Questioning this designation, O’Bryan investigates the extant documentary evidence in order to ascertain how and why the figure was identified as a dwarf. While she situates the portrait within the princely tradition for dwarfs and dwarf imagery, she brings in other dwarfs in the courts of the Farnese dukes and cardinals and their representation in dynastic art to propose a possible scenario that allowed for the dwarf identification to be made. Importantly, she subjects the portrait to a detailed iconographic analysis, focusing special attention on the sitter’s martial attributes and relating the work to contemporary and parodic portraits of European court dwarfs shown in chivalric military garb. Since the comic element is absent in Gersmueter’s painting, O’Bryan argues that the entire body of evidence prompts us to reconsider that the portrait depicts a “real” dwarf, suggesting instead that the sitter was a favored attendant with a military background operating in ducal employ.

In chapter 9, Sarah McBryde addresses issues of gender as she focuses special attention on a female dwarf documented at the court of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici and his wife Eleonora of Toledo in Florence. Consistent with the duties assigned favored court dwarfs, the extant records show that the dwarf Maria seems to have served the function of lady-in-waiting, entrusted with important tasks, including handling sums of money on Duchess Eleonora’s behalf—and clearly not functioning as a jester. McBryde argues that, because of her importance to the duchess, Maria may be the dwarf depicted in a

fresco in the Palazzo Vecchio painted in 1557 to celebrate the marriage of Catherine de' Medici to the French king's son Henri II, this despite the fact that no female dwarfs were documented as being in attendance at the 1533 event. She further posits that the dwarf's distinctive headdress was based on a drawing by Michelangelo in the ducal collection, the aspects of dress serving a symbolic purpose to reinforce the marital theme. Given "Maria's" juxtaposition with the new bride, McBryde also proposes that the dwarf may have served as a marital charm, not unlike the apotropaic function assigned to Mantegna's female dwarf in the Gonzaga fresco—and similar to depictions of male dwarfs situated by the bride in other paintings produced for the Medici.

Sandra Cheng turns the discussion from "real" to imaginary dwarfs and giants in chapter 10 as she examines their role in early modern caricature. The origins for what became a new genre in art can be traced to the Carracci family of painters in Bologna in 1582, whose instructional methods advocated drawing from life and viewing beauty and ugliness through the lens of monstrosity to create playful ridiculous portraits (*ritratti ridicoli*). In graphic works, giants and dwarfs made perfect subjects, not only for artists exploiting and exaggerating their physical imperfections, but also for manipulating contrasts in scale for comic effect. Following on the heels of Jacques Callot's *gobbi* series, Stefano della Bella and Baccio de Bianco affiliated with the Medici court in Florence made dwarfs a cornerstone of their caricatures, with Baccio earning renown for his laughter-inducing "dwarferies" and his *caramogi* (hunchbacked dwarfs). Jusepe de Ribera and Pier Francesco Mola emphasized figural disparities in scale to make satirical commentaries on the seventeenth-century art market, poking fun at the untrained connoisseurs who wielded undue influence. As Cheng points out, the Carracci and their followers used their imagery to ridicule various social classes: itinerant tradespeople, teachers, doctors, singers, musicians, street characters, art dealers—and artists themselves—all transformed into dwarfs. Their caricatures thus mirrored the themes of burlesque literary works that lampooned contemporary society.

In the final chapter, Felicia Else combines the period interest in heroic colossal statuary with the Florentine taste for parody, to focus on the fountain statue of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici presented in the guise of Neptune. Bartolomeo Ammannati's sculptural ensemble created in 1560–75 was subsequently assigned the nickname "Biancone" by the Florentine public, a pejorative that may be translated literally as "Big White One" (or colloquially as "Giant Whitey"). Searching for the first written reference to "Biancone," Else sets the stage with the burlesque pasquinades and epic

poems about giants and dwarfs that flourished in mid-sixteenth century Florence, before finding the term in Lorenzo Lippi's *Il Malmantile*, published a century later. In this mock-epic poem, Lippi invoked popular Florentine monuments and landmarks and reprised the theme of mid-cinquecento burlesque literary works that featured dwarfs battling giants, to highlight words and phrases from the Florentine vernacular. Significantly, the central character was dubbed "Biancone" after Ammannati's sculpture, a "bumbling anti-hero" whose nickname makes an implicit mockery of the statue. Contrasting the taste for the large and the small, and pointing out the confluences of giants and dwarfs expressed in names or characteristics, Else's analysis provides another rich accounting of the tradition in which the giant and dwarf pairing functioned as a topos unto itself in early modern Europe.

The "Biancone" sobriquet attached to Ammannati's colossal statue of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici offers cogent evidence of how the contemporary enthusiasm for giants and dwarfs was also reflected in early modern rhetoric, not just in writing, but also in the spoken word. In stark contrast to the giant metaphor employed as an expression of valiant and grandiose achievement, it is also an unusual example of the giant evocation being used as a pejorative in the (re)construction of a ruler's identity—although to be sure the Medici duke had nothing to say about the disparaging term ascribed to his oversized effigy. As for actual giants, despite their importance in the courts and their representation in imagery, they are not shown accompanying their patrons in portraiture, unlike dwarfs whose miniature scale posed no challenges to perceptions of elite status and ruling authority. While dwarfs were certainly more abundant—and they figured more frequently in period imagery (albeit primarily male)—as the essays in this volume reveal, not all court dwarfs assumed the role of jester or buffoon, although the element of humor was certainly present in some of the works under review. From the serious to the parodic, the heroic to the carnivalesque, this collection takes us back to a time when giants and dwarfs as real, imagined, and metaphorical entities figured prominently in European art and culture.

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# Part I

Northern Climes



# 1. Out of Scale: Naming and Identity of Late Medieval Giants

*Assaf Pinkus*

## Abstract

Six colossal figures of giants and giantesses, anti-heroes of Arthurian romances, welcome visitors entering the guest rooms of the Summer House at Schloss Runkelstein. Although named after specific giants, the visual properties and attributes of the figures suggested a different identity to late medieval viewers. While described in the texts as repulsive and evil, in the frescoes they appear as symbols of bravery and virtue. Being executed “out of scale,” unable to be fully grasped somatically by the viewer, they were both physically and ethically abject but also magnificent. This essay explores the discrepancy between the giants’ identity and the somatic experience of the gigantic, duly suggesting that the giants may have functioned as a metaphor for the work’s commissioners.

**Keywords:** Schloss Runkelstein, giantesses, Arthurian literature, Middle High German literature, somaticism, scaling

In the wrathful vision of St. Gregory the Great, giants are denied salvation and will neither be resurrected nor gain salvation at the End of Times.<sup>1</sup> Characterized by the sins of pride and arrogance, they resemble demons striving against God.<sup>2</sup> Their transgressive character is manifested in their

1 “Lo. The giants groan under the water ... the giants shall not rise up again ... after their transgression being swollen with pride, they do not have recourse to the remedies of penitence”; Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, 2:298.

2 Cohen, *Of Giants*, 51. “Nemrod gigas diaboli typum expressit, qui superbo appetitu culmen celsitudinis appetivi” (The giant Nimrod is a type of the devil because in his pride he strove to reach the highest peak of divinity, saying I will rise above the height of the clouds and be like the most high); Isidore of Seville, *Etymologia*, PL, 83:103.

exaggerated size and physical excess, which together signal a surfeit of sexuality and violence, as well as immorality. Consequently, they were perceived as doomed, to be obliterated. In spite of this negative perception, giants became objects of fascination and even admiration in the late medieval culture.<sup>3</sup> They occupied a central role in numerous Middle High German epics, romances, and farces, and their images adorned both sacred and lay public spheres, including church sanctuaries, external town walls, marketplaces, fountains, harbors, river banks, and even private dwellings.<sup>4</sup> In Middle High German literature, giants were attributed a specific origin: the *Land im Gebirge*—land in the mountains—a label that refers to South Tyrol and the area around the Elbe River, which crosses the Giant Mountains (Krkonoše Mountains/Riesengebirge), particularly the region around the German/Silesian border.<sup>5</sup> Little wonder then, that between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, colossal representations of mythological, biblical, and epic giants dominated the landscape of the German-speaking regions.

The sudden popularity that marked giant imagery is bound to its political implications. In the biblical and epical tales, heroes who sought to establish a genealogical or political claim often had to overcome a giant: Esau killed Nimrod (Midrash Rabbah 63:10); Moses killed Og (Num 21:33–35); David killed Goliath (1 Sam 17:50); Brutus killed Gog and Magog; Odin killed Ymir; Arthur killed the giant of Mont-Saint-Michel; and Roland killed the Saracen giant Ferracutus.<sup>6</sup> The new political claims of the Free Hanseatic and Imperial cities of northern Germany and in South Tyrol, and the ascent of the low-ranked *Ministerialer* (members of the service nobility in the Middle Ages) to prominent political positions and patrons of the arts in South Tyrol, required a novel form of political and cultural assertion.<sup>7</sup> Giants served this

3 For an essential introduction to this thinking, see Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 5–36; Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 58–97; Classen, “‘The Other’ in Medieval Narratives and Epics,” 83–121; and especially Cohen, *Of Giants*, 1–61.

4 On the role of giants in this body of literature, see Boyer, *Giant Hero*, 39–50. However, the frequency of the representation of giants in the late medieval public and private spaces had never been discerned as a consolidated phenomenon prior to my own study (Pinkus, *Giants in the Medieval City*, Brepols, 2024). For a short introduction see, Pinkus, “Experiencing the Gigantic,” 1–2.

5 See, for example, the entries for 1492 and 1557 in Simon Hüttel, *Chronik der Stadt Trautenau*, 2:225. On the labeling of South Tyrol as *Land im Gebirge*, see Stampfer and Steppan, *Die romanische Wandmalerei*, 11–12.

6 Recounted in the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* and modeled upon David and Goliath; see Crosland, *Old French Epic*, 26.

7 On the *Ministerialer* and their self-fashioning through the imaging of courtly literature, see Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, 32–33, 77–78, 245–56; and Curschmann, *Vom Wandel im bildlichen Umgang*, 9–10.

aim well. They were employed in a positive manner to demonstrate and confirm the competency of the new civic strata. Having risen above the bourgeoisie to acquire significant political power, but not yet fully accepted by the existing aristocracy, these new players were of liminal status, similar to that of giants, which could thus effectively serve as their visual surrogate.<sup>8</sup>

While the giants in courtly literature are given specific and individual names and identities, in the visual arts, I argue, these gigantic, “out-of-scale” beings were cast as incomprehensible, both in terms of their colossal size and due to the discrepancy between naming and identity.<sup>9</sup> Although they are formally named after specific giants (through inscriptions), I argue that the visual properties and attributes of the figures would in fact have suggested a different identity to late medieval viewers. Since the naming of a figure would evoke certain visual expectations, and since medieval imagery was executed according to specific sets of conventions and associations, if the traditional attributes of these figures were denied, then another identity could have been considered. I will explore the naming of the figures and their visually transpired identity as constituting two different semiotic systems, while tracing the notion of “the gigantic” in late medieval culture and the web of associations related to colossal figures from the perspective of their visibility. Moreover, measuring approximately four meters high and installed in locations preventing assessment of their actual size, these giant figures were executed “out of scale,” unable to be grasped somatically either by the human body and its physical perception or by the eyes, and thus evoking a sense of alienation and wonder.

Somaticism considers the viewer’s body as a medium upon which aesthetics is explored, the “medium of all perception.”<sup>10</sup> This kind of interpretation takes into account, for example, the scale of the piece, whether it is above or below life-size, which will determine whether the viewers are able to measure the depicted images upon their own bodies.<sup>11</sup> Life-size images encourage a corporeal physical understanding of images, making them

8 Haug, “Das Bildprogramm im Sommerhaus,” 24–36, and Curschmann, *Vom Wandel im bildlichen Umgang*, 28–33.

9 The most perplexing discrepancy is that of the colossal figure of Roland. While named after the hero of the *Chanson de Roland*, he lacks any attributes that would identify him as such; instead, he has all the attributes of epical giants, sometimes even of pagan deities such as Thor; see Pinkus “Giant of Bremen.”

10 Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, 11–56; Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body*, 47–67; and Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 1–2.

11 For a discussion on the role of the body in experiencing medieval imagery, see Pinkus, *Visual Aggression*, 67–70.



part of the spatial experience of the viewers, who can measure them upon their own bodies. Small-scale and miniature images attract an inquiring gaze, initiating intimate relations between viewers and objects. If the images are of a colossal scale, spectators cannot measure the images directly against their own bodies; rather, they use the imaginative faculty in order to understand their magnitude as an immeasurable multiple of the size of their own bodies. Hence, through their exaggerated size the figures could have communicated ideas about excess, being both physically and ethically abject but, at the same time, magnificent.

Both notions—that of out of scale and the discrepancy between naming and identity—are clearly evident in the spectacular rendition of *The Greatest Giants and Giantesses* in Schloss Runkelstein, executed between 1395 and 1413. Acquired in 1385 by the brothers Niklaus and Franz Vintler, the castle underwent considerable expansion and was adorned with several enormous painting cycles, carried out in several campaigns by a number of unknown artists based in South Tyrol, who were trained in the latest Italian *trecento* innovations.<sup>12</sup> Although the frescoes have suffered from successive renovations, restorations, and the ravages of time (especially after a section of the walls collapsed in 1868), the paintings still constitute the largest and most spectacular visualization of the ethos and habits of late medieval courtly love and life, including tournaments, hunting excursions, ball games, dances, lovers, erotic images, and even so-called bathing scenes.<sup>13</sup> The most unique cycle, however, appears in the newly built Summer House (*Summerhaws*), comprising the western wing of the castle, which was adorned with frescoes between 1395 and 1400.<sup>14</sup>

12 Grebe, "Runkelstein als Bilderburg," 197–369. For the circumstance of the Vintlers' acquisition and patronage of the castle, see Wetzel, "Die Runkelsteiner Vintler," 291–310; and Torggler, "Die Zeit des Hans Vintler," 13–44. However, the identity and training of these artists remains unknown according to Grebe, "Runkelstein als Bilderburg," 202.

13 For a comprehensive study of all the cycles, see Grebe, "Runkelstein als Bilderburg," 197–369, and Domanski and Krenn, "Die profanen Wandmalereien," 99–154. For the cycle of the Summer House, see Haug et al., *Runkelstein: Die Wandmalerei des Sommerhauses*.

14 A (now lost) inscription in the adjunct chapel of the castle, a seventeenth-century document, and the heraldic coat of arms, as well as stylistic ascriptions, confirm the dating of the frescoes to after 1393 and most probably between 1395 and 1400. The inscription reads: "Anno domini nostri Jesu Cristi a nativitate / millesimo tricentesimo octuagesimo quinto... / ...pr...nte gra / Ego Nicolaus Vintler hoc castrum Runkelstain nuncupatum legaliter comparavi / Tandem anno etc. [MCCC]LXXXVIII mense augusti possessionem eiusdem castri corporaliter subinivi, quod quidem castrum hactenus instructis (instructis?), mineralibus, muris vacatum (AG: vactum?) e mar... (maiore?, AG: maur.) desolatum edificiis fossato antemuralibus, campis, cisternis, salis, stubis, ac pluribus commodis augendo a novo edidi et reformavi etc."; transcribed in Grebe, "Runkelstein als Bilderburg," 200.



Figure 1.1 Schloss Runkelstein, Summer House Balcony, ca. 1395–1413. Bolzano, Italy. Photo: Stiftung Bozner Schlösser/Fondazione Castelli di Bolzano.

The Summer House is a two-story structure with a balcony that opens to an inner courtyard of the castle. Originally, one entered the house through a door on the upper floor that was adorned with the Vintlers' coat of arms. The first room, decorated with episodes from Gottfried von Strassbourg's *Tristan* romance, led to the Garel Room, a lounge or sleeping room with a fireplace, where the entire space is filled with a fresco cycle of an epic narrative drawn from the Arthurian romance *Garel von dem blühenden Tal* (Garel of the Blossoming Valley), composed by Der Pleier around 1260–80.<sup>15</sup> Both rooms are connected from the outside by a balcony that is decorated with over-life-size representations of chivalric role models (figure 1.1): the Nine Worthies; several triads of great heroes, lovers, and warrior-knights from courtly Arthurian literature; and colossal images of the three greatest warrior-giants and the three most powerful giantesses (figures 1.2 and 1.3).<sup>16</sup> The lower floor, the so-called Wigalois Room (*Vigeles Sal*), continues with giant-themed imagery, illustrating scenes from the *Wigalois of Wirnt von Gravenberg* (ca. 1220), another Arthurian epic in which a giantess plays a prominent role.<sup>17</sup> Because those frescoes are barely discernible today, in the following I will focus on the most elaborate depiction—that of the six greatest giants and giantesses featured on the exterior wall of the upper balcony.

<sup>15</sup> Der Pleier, *Garel von dem blühenden Tal*.

<sup>16</sup> The identity of some the giants is still debatable, as some of the inscriptions are damaged and can be interpreted in more than one way. They were documented by Zingerle, "Die Fresken im Schlosse Runkelstein," 467–69, and Zingerle, "Zu den Bildern in Runkelstein," 28–30.

<sup>17</sup> On the Wigalois cycle, see Huschenbett, "Beschreibung der Bilder des Wigalois-Zyklus," 170–77.



Figure 1.2 The Three Greatest Warrior-Giants, ca. 1395–1413. Fresco, Summer House balcony, Schloss Runkelstein, Bolzano, Italy. Photo: Stiftung Bozner Schlösser/Fondazione Castelli di Bolzano.

The showcase of heroes of mythological status begins on the southern end of the balcony with the Nine Worthies (figure 1.4). These symbols of bravery and chivalry comprise Hector, Alexander the Great, and Julius Caesar as representatives of pagan antiquity; Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus as Old Testament heroes; and King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon as three Christian kings.<sup>18</sup> These nine exemplars are followed by the three greatest heroes of King Arthur's Round Table: Parzival, Iwein, and Gawain; the three greatest pairs of lovers of the courtly romances: Tristan and Isolde, Wilhelm of Austria and Aglie, and Wilhelm of Orleans and Amelie (figure 1.5); and finally, the three greatest epical

18 For the iconography of the Nine Worthies, see Schroeder, *Der Topos der Nine Worthies*, 46–66; Andergassen, “Re Artù in Italia,” 41–72; and Egorov, “Charismatic Rulers in Civic Guise,” 205–39.



Figure 1.3 The Three Most Powerful Giantesses, ca. 1395–1413. Fresco, Summer House balcony, Schloss Runkelstein, Bolzano, Italy. Photo: Stiftung Bozner Schlösser/Fondazione Castelli di Bolzano.

warriors: Dietrich of Bern, Siegfried, and Dietlieb von Steier, identified through the names of their swords. The spectacle of heroes ends with the colossal imagery of the three greatest warrior-giants—Waldram, Ortnit, and Schrutan—and warrior-giantesses—Rüel, Birkhilt, and Rachin.<sup>19</sup> The members of this gigantic clan appear twice the size of the other figures, which are themselves rendered larger than life-size. They therefore constitute not merely images of giants but gigantic representations, icons of enormousness. Three crowned miniature figures, identified by a (now lost) inscription as the Best Dwarfs, appear above the door that leads to the eastern wing.<sup>20</sup> Although these small figures make the giants look even larger, and therefore might function effectively within the somatic

19 The identity of the giantesses is also uncertain; see n. 17 above.

20 “Under allen twer[gen] waren das die drei besten g[etwerg].” The inscription is now lost; see Zingerle, “Zu den Bildern in Runkelstein,” 29.

experience of the balcony, they are most likely later additions and clearly differ in style and spatial perception from the other figures on the balcony.<sup>21</sup>

The first two triads of the Nine Worthies are painted in a consistent and matching manner: all the men are represented slightly larger than life in medieval terms (around 1.80 meters tall), they stand in full armor, and each group is clustered around a central hero: Alexander the Great leads the pagans, and David dominates the Old Testament kings (see again figure 1.4). The last triad, that of the Christians, is extricated from the exclusive context of the Nine Worthies and appears instead closely linked with the next conceptual triad, the great heroes of the Arthurian romances. Both of these groups are depicted as enthroned on a shared bench with the main protagonist of each group seated frontally between the other two, who are turned slightly towards him, creating two sets of closed and balanced compositions. All the figures are crowned and hold either a sword, flag, scepter, or other regal insignia. They are identified either by their coat of arms hanging on the illusionistic wall behind them, or by the names of their legendary swords specified in accompanying inscriptions. Although these figures are seated, they are larger than the standing pagan and Old Testament Worthies, and would therefore appear significantly over-life-size if standing up. Their stature marks their greatness, higher rank, and significance in the medieval world in comparison to the previous groupings. The three pairs of courtly lovers, who appear next, are shown standing with clasped hands to indicate their emotional engagement. They are arranged around the couple Wilhelm of Austria and Aglie, from the romance by Johannes of Würzburg.<sup>22</sup> The figures of the lovers are smaller than those of both the Worthies and the Arthurian heroes, and are proportioned smaller than life-size (or about 1.40 meters). The next triad, the bravest cavaliers, like the Christian Worthies are seated on a bench holding up their swords, but they are somewhat smaller in proportion than the Christian Worthies, who are 1.50 meters in height.

The various sizes of the different heroes seem to reflect their hierarchy in the Christian ethos and to convey a moral lesson: the smallest figures are those of the courtly lovers; next in size are the pagan and Old Testament embodiments of the Christian virtues; slightly bigger are the brave cavaliers of the romances; and, finally, the biggest figures, almost on a

21 Grebe, "Runkelstein als Bilderburg," 303–8. Zingerle has identified them as Goldemar, Bibung, and Alberich, "Zu den Bildern in Runkelstein," 29.

22 Johans von Würzburg, *Wilhelm von Österreich*.





Figure 1.4 The Nine Worthies, ca. 1395–1413. Fresco, Summer House balcony, Schloss Runkelstein, Bolzano, Italy. Photo: Stiftung Bozner Schlösser/Fondazione Castelli di Bolzano.



Figure 1.5 The Three Greatest Pairs of Courtly Lovers, ca. 1395–1413. Fresco, Summer House balcony, Schloss Runkelstein, Bolzano, Italy. Photo: Stiftung Bozner Schlösser/Fondazione Castelli di Bolzano.

colossal scale, are the New Testament kings and Arthurian protagonists (figures 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6). Hence, size is used here to express efficacy, virtue, and centrality in the sacred history. It is therefore all the more striking that this demonstrative parade of Christian values culminates in yet another, even more extreme, inflation of size: the six giants, each measuring ca. 3.5 meters in height. Unlike any of the other figures, the bodies of the giants spill over the borders of the murals, encroaching upon the area of the column bases and socles (figures 1.6 and 1.7). As true colossi, the giants thus extend beyond the acceptable proportions of their space, unable to be fully grasped even by today's modern cameras. Originally, however, before the nineteenth-century wooden fence was added to the balcony and blocked its view from the courtyard, the giants would have been fully visible from a distance.<sup>23</sup> Viewers standing in the original open court would have been able to see these colossi at a sufficient distance from below, against the background of the South Tyrolean mountain ranges (figure 1.8).

Due to the partial deterioration of the inscriptions—most of which are now lost but were largely recorded in the nineteenth century—the exact identity of some of the giants is debatable.<sup>24</sup> It is commonly agreed, however, that they portray Waldram, Ornit, and Schrutun/Struthan in the male entourage; and Rüel, Birkhilt/Frau Ritsch, and Rachin in the female retinue. Their specific identities, however, are of lesser importance, I would argue, because neither the giants nor the giantesses are depicted as individualized according to their narratives, but rather as a generalized conceptualization of the notion of the gigantic.

Armin Torggler has recently echoed previous scholarship in asserting that the literary source for the giants is the poem *Der Rosengarten zu Worms* (The Rosegarten at Worms, ca. 1250), which derives from the *Nibelungenlied*.<sup>25</sup> The three male giants depicted in Runkelstein are probably those who fought on the side of Kriemhild, and their original inscriptions referred to the verses stating that they are the biggest giants that ever existed and the

23 Torggler, "Riesen und Zwerge auf Schloss Runkelstein," 123–25.

24 In addition to n. 16 above, see also Rasmo, "Runkelstein," 167; Domanski and Krenn, "Die profanen Wandmalereien im Sommerhaus," 99; Pizzinini, "Der letzte treue Knappe," 245; and Torggler, "Riesen und Zwerge auf Schloss Runkelstein," 130–40.

25 Torggler, "Riesen und Zwerge auf Schloss Runkelstein," 127–28. On the origin and transmission of this work, see Heinzle, *Einführung in die mittelhochdeutsche Dietrichepik*, 169–87, and Curschmann, "Zur Wechselwirkung von Literatur und Sage," 380–410. This work, focusing on the epic hero Dietrich von Bern, is also called *Der grose Rosengarten* to differentiate it from *Der kleine Rosengarten* dealing with the dwarf Laurin.



Figure 1.6 The Three Greatest Arthurian Warriors (portion), the Three Greatest Giants, the Three Greatest Giantesses, and the Three Best Dwarfs (on back wall), ca. 1395–1413 (view from balcony platform). Fresco, Summer House, Schloss Runkelstein, Bolzano, Italy. Photo: George Tatge, for Alinari Archives, Florence – Collection: Alinari Archives-Seat Archive.



Figure 1.7 The Three Greatest Arthurian Warriors (left) and The Three Greatest Giants (right), ca. 1395–1413 (view taken from the courtyard). Fresco, Summer House balcony, Schloss Runkelstein, Bolzano, Italy. Photo: George Tatge, for Alinari Archives, Florence – Collection: Alinari Archives-Seat Archive.





Figure 1.8 View of Schloss Runkelstein Summer House balcony frescoes with Dolomites Mountains in the background, ca. 1395–1413. Bolzano, Italy. Photo: Assaf Pinkus.

strongest among their species.<sup>26</sup> These giants are not only depicted detached from their individual tales, but their attributes also turn them into more general abstractions of the gigantic (see figure 1.2). On the right, Schrutan, for example, holds a huge tree trunk in his hand; has long white hair, a wild, uncombed, curly beard, and is crowned by a wreath of branches.<sup>27</sup> Overall, his characteristics identify him as a hybrid between a giant and a wild man.<sup>28</sup> Yet, he still wears knightly armor and, although marked as a wild man, he differs from the truly wild giants detailed in the *Wolfdietrich* saga (ca. 1250), which recounts the adventures of the eponymous hero who encounters a giant whose

[...] face was long and broad. His eyes were yellow ... His nose was formed like the horn of a goat. Many heroes lost their lives because of the *Waldaffe* (forest monkey). The hair on his head was as white as a swan: the face of the unbaptized man was black. His mouth so broad, as we can read here, no man has ever seen a wider mouth. The teeth in his mouth were also

26 “[...] es waren das die drey risen groz altzeit die sterchten under iren genoz”; transcribed in Torggler, “Riesen und Zwerge auf Schloss Runkelstein,” 126.

27 The inscription reads “schrautan treit berz” (Schrautan, who holds the sword called Berz); see Domanski and Krenn, “Die profanen Wandmalereien,” 151 n. 23.

28 Ibid., 108. On the iconography of the wild man and wild woman, see Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, 21–48; Habiger-Tuczay, “Wilde Frau,” 603–15; and Hintz, “Der Wilde Mann,” 617–33. For their depiction in South Tyrol, see Rachewiltz, “Und finden sich noch täglich in Tirol,” 253–78.

white. When he started to commit evil deeds he wanted to gain renown. Now we tell of his ears and how they were fashioned: they seemed like donkey ears.<sup>29</sup>

The image of Schrutan at Schloss Runkelstein is clearly not demonized or dehumanized to such a degree as the monster in the text, but he is still encoded as a giant-wild man hybrid. While in the text the giant's evilness is marked first and foremost by his description as dark-skinned, in the image he is converted into a "baptized white"—overly encoding positivity and even magnanimity. The donkey ears—a sign of either a demonic being or a fool—are converted into well-proportioned ones; and he certainly does not appear as either a monkey or the devil incarnate. All that remains from his monstrous depiction is the wild curly hair, wide mouth with exposed white teeth, and the wild man's wreath of branches. Hence, he is depicted as part civilized and courtly and part wild and savage, rejecting any identification with a specific giant of the epics and instead indicating more of a typological allegory.

The giant next to him represents another type—that of a king: crowned, elegantly garbed, and with a fashionable short haircut and beard (figure 1.2, middle). The inscription that once accompanied the figure reads "Kinig O[rt]hneith treit ... rneit," which could be understood either as Ortwein or Ortnit.<sup>30</sup> In the epic *Ortnit von Lamparten* (1230), the protagonist is not explicitly labeled as a giant; he is a king, huge in stature, who is assisted in his adventures by the cunning dwarf Alberich and is eventually killed by dragons.<sup>31</sup> His size, his dwarf minion, and his final, ignoble defeat are all clues that Ortnit's true identity is not that of a Christian knight but of a giant. The *Rosengarten zu Worms* epic, in contrast, features a giant named Ortwin who was the most astute and crafty among his species.<sup>32</sup> While the wild boar on the shield hanging alongside the figure in the Runkelstein fresco

29 "Sin antlit was dem langen / wol einer ellen breit. / gel wâren im diu ougen ... Daz hâr ûf sinem houbet / was wîs also ein swan: / swarz was im sin antlit / dem ungetouften ma"; "Wolfdietrich D," 4:50, vv. 57–59. In addition to this monstrous description, donkey ears are also an attribute of the fool. *Wolfdietrich* narrates the adventures of the eponymous hero, who is disinherited by his father, the king of Constantinople, after his two brothers claim that he is a bastard. Calling for justice, Wolfdietrich applies to his ally Ortnit, but discovers that the giant has been murdered. During his journey of vengeance, Wolfdietrich kills two dragons and fights several giants.

30 He is usually identified as Ortnit; see Heinzle, "Die Triaden auf Runkelstein," 75. See also Kristina Domanski and Krenn, "Die profanen Wandmalereien," 104, 108, and 151 n. 23.

31 See *Ortnit and Wolfdietrich*.

32 He is described as the *listigste* (smart, sneaky, devious, cunning); see *Der Rosengarten zu Worms*, 125, in *Der Helden Buch*, 21.

might indeed attest to his identity as Ortwin, since it alludes to a verse in that epic, his crown, regalia, and modern, fashionable armor more clearly mark him as Ortnit. Regardless of his specific identity, his portrayal as a well-groomed, royal giant marks him as an antitype to the wild man-giant figure of Schrutan.<sup>33</sup>

The third male giant is securely identified by the inscription, “her waltram trait alweil” (Sir Waltram [carries the sword called] Alweil) (figure 1.2, left).<sup>34</sup> Waltram portrays a third type: not merely a hybrid giant, half-wild and half-civilized, but more articulately a pagan from an age long past. The sword at his side, his armor, and his title *her* (sir) in the inscription suggest his courtly character, while in contrast, the simple iron rod that he holds in his hands as a weapon, his headdress, his long, wild hair and beard, and his ragged shirt all suggest his identity as a pagan from ancient times.<sup>35</sup> In particular, the giant’s unique white headband with its loose ends is of an archaic style that belongs neither to the courtly fashion nor to the daily life of the time. Rather, it is reminiscent of the imaginary and pseudo-antique costumes worn by Hebrew prophets in many Gothic jamb statues: a signifier of the distant past.<sup>36</sup> The giant’s old-fashioned sword and iron rod also symbolize a fictionalized view of pagan times or antiquity.<sup>37</sup> The three male giants thus neither conform fully to depictions of demonic, frightening giants nor to the glamorous, courtly ones of the epics. Rather, the Runkelstein giants confront the viewer with different degrees of hybridity, combining both the bestial and the magnificent essences of giants. Together, they evoke three general abstractions of the gigantic: the wild, the courtly, and the time-honored ancient.

The female protagonists present other kinds of abstractions, less categorically differentiated and more nuanced (figure 1.3). Like their male companions, the three giantesses stand firmly, with the two outer figures flanking the central one and addressing her in agitated gestures of speech. Since their inscriptions have completely vanished, the exact identity of the

33 As is described in the epic: “Wer ist der mit den Fiedelen—also sprach sich Ortwein—Der also fast thut giedeln, recht als ein wüthend Schwein? / Er ist Volker genennet; sprach der alte Hildebrand—Wann er dich anerennet, so wehre dich, kühner Weigand”; *Der Rosengarten zu Worms*, in *Der Helden Buch*, 344.

34 Waltram is mentioned only rarely in the epics, and the reason for his inclusion here remains unclear; see Haug, *Strukturen als Schlüssel zur Welt*, 708.

35 Torggler, “Riesen und Zwerge auf Schloss Runkelstein,” 133–36.

36 The same headband features in Strasbourg Cathedral on the jambs of the west facade, the Passion portal, and the second prophet on the right wall, all from ca. 1300.

37 On the notion of “old” as a mark of antiquity, see Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 1–7; 119–21.

middle giant is vague, but most studies have identified her either as Birkhilt or Frau Ritsch.<sup>38</sup> She is the only giantess wearing the modest white hood called a *Rise*, which completely covers her hair and neck in a manner that evokes the pious *Gebände* (a headdress comprising a linen band wrapped around the ears and chin, and held in place by a headband) of nuns and elderly widows. Although the epics describe giantesses as extremely ugly, crude, and repulsive, as fueled with fearsome rage—*freislich* (terrible or fearsome), *ungefüge* (coarse or clumsy), *ungehüre* (monstrous)—as uncontrollable as nature itself, and possessing superhuman strength that surpasses that of any male, in the fresco she appears very restrained.<sup>39</sup> Contrary to her self-disciplined posture, however, she wears a crown of branches above her hood and holds a rough wooden stick that might mark her as a wild woman, recalling Schrutan's headdress in figure 1.2. In addition, over her shoulder, this giantess wears a spectacular lion pelt (its head, legs, and tail clearly visible), a symbol of legendary strength that indicates she is the most powerful of her kind, analogous to Hercules. Significantly, the lion's tail has been configured so that it hangs prominently down from her groin [or between her legs]—rather than from her side—which is clearly suggestive of a phallus, a pictorial maneuver that renders her androgynous. Similar to the male giants, she thus appears as a liminal creature: her headdress and pose mark her as modest and civilized, a pious lady of the court, while the sword held in her left hand acts as a symbol of gender transgression, signifying male knighthood, and her crown and lion pelt place her in a liminal space between the wild, the powerful, and the regal.

To her right stands the giantess Rüel, whose narrative is also depicted in the Wigalois Room on the lower level of the Summer House. Her inscription, which is now lost but was recorded during the nineteenth century, read "Fraw riel nagelringen," identifying her as Frau Rüel with her legendary sword, Nareling, which was forged by the dwarf Alberich. Rüel wears a white wrapped hood resembling a peasant's headscarf, which allows her long, brown hair to flow freely and immodestly onto her shoulders. Although

38 There are no firm grounds for either of the identifications since the portrayal of the giants and giantesses is rather generic and not based on their individual tales or characteristics. To facilitate my discussion, I call the giantess Birkhilt here, following Zupitza, *Dietrichs Abenteuervon Albrecht von Kemenaten*, 45, and Zingerle, "Zu den Bildern in Runkelstein," 29. For an alternative possible identification as Frau Ritsch, see Domanski and Krenn, "Die profanen Wandmalereien," 109.

39 "[...] diu ist in zorn ain übel wip. / ir ist ouch ruch aller ir lip ... / zehant si dich enterbet / des libes. / das wil ich dir sagen: ir muot, der ist so grimme, / sie mag dirs niht vertragen"; *Das Eckenlied*, 95, 231.2–12.

loose and ineffective, the headdress nonetheless serves to mark her as a married woman. With her right hand, Rüel addresses Birkhilt in a speaking gesture, while her left hand rests on her long sword in its scabbard, a gesture typically used by knights when they appeared in court or in a civilian context.<sup>40</sup> In *Wigalois*, Rüel is described as naked with a long braid that sways around her hips, a large head, a flat nose, and pendulous breasts that swing at her sides, aspects of appearance that were used for the giantess in the early thirteenth-century fresco at St. Jakob in Kastelaz, in which the naked, wild, and terrified giantess reveals to the devotees the fatal atrocities of the flood and the drowning hybrids (figure 1.9).<sup>41</sup> None of these demonized, degrading features, however, are visualized in Runkelstein. The giantess's brownish-red sleeveless tunic is girded at the waist with a wide white cloth over a chain mail shirt—an outmoded style of armor that signals her belonging to an ancient time.<sup>42</sup> Her outdated fashion and peasant headgear parallel those of Waltram (see again figure 1.2, left), and both giants are usually understood as symbolic of the pagan past. It is interesting to note, however, that Rüel is not armed with the “primitive” weapons of her male counterparts, but instead is shown with a chivalric sword.

The last giantess, to Birkhilt's left, is, as her inscription once read, “Fraw rachyn,” Frau Rachin (figure 1.3, right). Like Birkhilt, in the *Eckenlied*, about the legendary hero Dietrich von Bern (ca. 1230), she is described as uncontrollably wild and always naked.<sup>43</sup> Her monstrosity is moderated in the depiction at Runkelstein since she wears a leather-armored military costume, perhaps indicating the Roman period. She is nonetheless shown as the wildest of the three giantesses: a simple and thin white cloth (called a *Schappel*) barely restrains her disheveled hair, and she waves a rough

40 For examples of this gesture, see the Ekkehard and Hermann founder figures from Naumburg Cathedral (ca. 1249).

41 “[...] ir här enflohten unde lanc, / zetal in ir buoge ez fwanc. / ir houbet gröz, ir nafe flach ... ir brüfte nider hiengen: die fiten fi beviengen”; Wirnt von Grafenberg, *Wigalois*, 161.26–28, and 163.10–11.

42 Such a costume was common in the first quarter of the fourteenth century but was already outmoded by the middle of that century according to Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms*, 191–206.

43 The mid-thirteenth-century *Eckenlied* tells of a pair of brother giants, Ecke and Vasolt/Fasolt, who plot to fight the celebrated hero Dietrich von Bern. After Ecke is killed by Dietrich, the brothers' mother Birkhilt sets out to revenge his death. When Birkhilt too is defeated and killed, her daughter Uodelgart, the strongest of all the giantesses, continues the struggle, only to find death herself, also at the hands of Dietrich. The narrative of her being subdued appears in Fassung E7, *Das Eckenlied*, 2:266.8.



Figure 1.9 The Primordial Giantess, ca. 1215. Fresco, apse of St. Jakob in Kastelaz, Tramin, Italy. Photo: Assaf Pinkus.

club in her right hand, an attribute that iconographically signals both a wild woman and a fool.<sup>44</sup>

Hence, while the three male giants fairly clearly embody the notions of the royal, the wild, and the pagan, the three giantesses display more complex interwoven identities. Each one variously combines traits that evoke these three characteristics, drawing on mixed signifiers alluding simultaneously to courtly knighthood, wild strength, and pagan impropriety, as well as to both the contemporary period and the ancient past. Moreover, whereas in the epics male giants are sometimes converted to Christianity and achieve salvation, the giantesses are always subdued and slaughtered. Any particular identities of both the giants and giantesses are subordinated to the general experience of the gigantic that they broadcast: all six are depicted as colossal, of enormous dimensions, visible from a great distance. As such, regardless of their specific iconography, they leave an unparalleled impressive effect

<sup>44</sup> On the club as an attribute of the fool, see Gross “*La Folie*,” 40, 97–130; Fritz, *Le discours du fou au Moyen Age*, 44–45; and Pinson, *Fools’ Journey*, 34.

on the bodies and minds of their viewers. It is their objectively colossal size that dominates both the balcony and the mountainous landscape behind it.

On the balcony wall, the giants and giantesses are experienced as colossi due to their absolute, objective measurements and the physical space they occupy. Their immense size exceeds even the space allotted them, and they overflow the borders of the pictorial field. When standing on the narrow platform of the balcony (only one meter in width), viewers are unable to perceive the giants in their entirety; the giants' surplus is beyond the viewers' somatic apprehension, inducing in the viewers an even greater sense of foreignness, alienation, and wonder. The giants are rendered practically out of scale: beyond normal proportions, transgressing the space of the fresco, and they cannot therefore be scaled upon the bodies of the viewers. The sole visual elements that remain "in scale" and that are comprehensible and discernable for the viewers, despite their very close proximity to the images (figure 1.10), are the individual attributes that mark the giants and giantesses' types. Signifying the qualities of the regal, wild, pagan, powerful, courtly, etc., these details include the named swords, the types of armor, the tree-trunk club, gold crowns, and the crown of branches, as well as the various headdresses and particular garments, such as the Roman skirt and lion pelt. When viewed from the castle courtyard below, however, these attributes are too small to be identified, and the only things perceptible to the viewers are the immense bodies of the giants.

On the one hand, their huge size, overwhelming and challenging, must have posed a threat both to the aristocratic viewers (present at social gatherings in a private dwelling) and to the heroes of the epic tales, since the giants' uncontrollable power was beyond that of the civilized human realm. On the other hand, once conquered or converted to Christianity, this great power became something to be admired. With their hybrid characteristics, the giants depicted in the fresco touch on both of these readings. In both cases, however, the sheer size and enormity of these iconic giants conduced to the very physical sense of awe that the viewers experienced in their bodies, as elicited by the huge images. The images could thus have aroused an ambivalent somatic experience—of the magnificent and of the threatening.

Unlike the hybrids and other fabulous creatures that were considered to exist at the edges of the world, giants were liminal creatures, dwelling in a space between that of urban life and that of nature; not fully human yet not fully monstrous; not fully civilized yet not fully wild; not fully abject and yet not fully exalted. Moving from their dwellings in liminal



Figure 1.10 Detail of *The Three Giantesses*, ca. 1395–1413 (view from the balcony platform). Fresco, Summer House, Schloss Runkelstein, Bolzano, Italy. Photo: Assaf Pinkus.

space into the very public spaces in late medieval cities and castles, they challenged many theological and philosophical assumptions regarding these categories and definitions. Hence, the visual properties of the out-of-scale giants might have served to reflect contemporary perceptions of socio-ethical and gender relations among peoples and even races (humans versus giants and, by implication, the Christian devotees versus the Other), and the natural world. Scaling of the world of phenomena—of humans, half-humans, and non-humans—evokes the familiar, the foreign, and the marvelous, respectively, rendering them quantifiable. Although giants are not the main protagonists of the Arthurian literature and are mostly portrayed as ambivalent in character, they became a main concern in late medieval aristocratic art and identity. Often malicious and repulsive, they are also, remarkably, sometimes depicted as courtly and brave, symbols of chivalric virtues. In Runkelstein they are included in the prestigious company of the Nine Worthies, which featured mainly in town halls and public fountains. Epitomizing civic pride, identity, and genealogy, and representing chivalric ideals, the Worthies were often supplemented with additional triads of local heroes, representing local bravery.<sup>45</sup> This

45 Schröder, *Der Topos der Nine*, 168–202.



makes the inclusion of the giants in Runkelstein all the more intriguing, as it might attest to the immediate concerns and identity of the murals' commissioners.

Both brothers, Niklaus and Franz, are represented several times as the commissioners of the frescoes, by means of dedication imagery, coats of arms, and inscriptions.<sup>46</sup> The social ascent of the family was accelerated through the marriage of their father, Konrad II, to Agnes Weis, daughter of a businessman from Bozen, following which the Vintlers soon became the major financiers of the local dukes and bishops.<sup>47</sup> Their newly and quickly acquired wealth enabled them to join the lower rank of the service nobility of the *Ministerialer/Ministerialadel* (hence their title of merely "ab dem Runkelstein" rather than "von," the higher aristocratic designation).<sup>48</sup> As newcomers to the aristocracy they demonstrated their new social status by turning their acquisition—Schloss Runkelstein—into a burgeoning court of literary and artistic activity. In their grand library, courtly literature was not only collected but was also composed. Heinz Sentlinger arrived from Munich, commissioned by Niklaus to write his *Weltchronik*, and he was also entrusted with the management and supervision of the library. In 1411 Vintler's own son, Hans, translated the early fourteenth-century Italian didactic poem, Tommaso dei Gozzadini's *Fwri di virtu* (The Flowers of Virtue and The Crown) into Middle High German, approximately around the time of the frescoes' completion.<sup>49</sup>

Although it cannot be determined whether the depiction of the Nine Worthies and the Giants on the balcony at Schloss Runkelstein was inspired by the texts that were circulating in the castle's library, the subject matter does attest to a shared interest in erudition and a similar cultural milieu. Nevertheless, since the choice of the poems for the pictorial cycles, as well as the heroes that were appended to include the Nine Worthies (such as the three greatest pair of lovers) are sometimes marginal to the Arthurian literature, the frescoes to a certain degree reflect a personal taste and selection. The frescoes in the other rooms in the Summer House attest to the acquaintance with such romances as Tristan, Wigalois, Ywein, Parzival, Dietrichepik, Gawain (and more, specifically *Diu Crône* (The Crown) by

46 For example, the brothers appear with their coat of arms, two bear paws, above the door to the so-called bathroom, ca. 1390. For an introduction to their patronage, see Haug, *Die Wandmalerei des Sommerhauses*, 9–15; Haug "Das Bildprogramm im Sommerhaus von Runkelstein," 24–27; and Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, 246–47.

47 Rasmø "Runkelstein," 109–76, especially 115.

48 On the initial "ab" as marking the lower nobility, see Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, 246.

49 Dörner, "Vintler, Hans," 4: cols. 698–701; 5: col. 1112.

Heinrichs von dem Tuerlin, ca. 1220), and a familiarity with several other texts by Rudolf von Ems and Johan von Würzburg that were probably included in the Vintlers' collection.<sup>50</sup> The most interesting choice in the selection of the heroes featured in the Summer House is that of the giants and giantesses.

Giants have tended to appear in a given culture at moments of political and social change or struggle; moments of new territorial and sovereign claims.<sup>51</sup> Ascending from the civic middle class to the lower ranking nobility of the *Ministerialer* and then to the status of prominent administrative key players and patrons of the arts in South Tyrol required the Vintlers to display new forms of political and cultural assertion.<sup>52</sup> Since claiming to be heirs to the Nine Worthies or successors of the Arthurian heroes would have been not only inappropriate in regard to their modest origin, but almost heretical, they needed, instead, to adopt new figures with which to identify and through which their identity could be exclusively projected.<sup>53</sup> Giants were the perfect surrogates for this aim. Like the giants themselves, the Vintlers were of liminal status, distancing themselves from their modest origin and yet not fully assimilated into the high aristocracy, which chose not to unite with them through marriage. They were concomitantly insiders and outsiders of the social structure. Moreover, for their patrons—the dukes and bishops of Bozen—the Vintlers were both a threat to be controlled and an instrument/service to be used. By manifesting themselves as aligned with positive, courtly giant imagery, the Vintlers may have sought to proclaim their successful social climbing and the possibility of mobility between the classes. Like the visual giants, who were in a transformative stage between the wild and the cultivated, the Vintlers were in a liminal status of social ascent, no longer belonging to the civic middle class, albeit not yet fully assimilated as aristocrats; as such they were concomitantly a threat and a promise to the social order, insiders and outsiders. By representing the richness of their immense library on the walls of their castle, they made their cultural competency visible,

50 On the library, see discussion by Haug in the section entitled "II. Das literarische Leben auf Runkelstein zur Zeit der Vintlers"; "Das Bildprogramm im Sommerhaus von Runkelstein," 24–36.

51 Cohen, *Of Giants*, 29–61.

52 On the *Ministerialer* and their self-fashioning through imaging of the courtly literature, see Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, 32–33, 77–78, and 245–56.

53 On the ways through which the choice of specific narratives and protagonists reflect the identity of the work's commissioners, see Schlink, "Der Stifter schleicht sich in die Heilsgeschichte ein," 203–11.

while also paying homage to the appropriate social hierarchy and upper classes that were symbolized by the Arthurian heroes, as an embodiment of knighthood.<sup>54</sup> Thus the Vintlers were themselves the converted giants of the balcony: powerful, regal, and virtuous; of ancient origin but also of “dubious” beginnings.

Giants were therefore the true heroes of the ascending *Ministerialer*, bearers of their identity, and the vehicle of their aspirations. Entering the Summer House from the balcony, the Vintlers' guests experienced the greatness, bravery, and virtuousness of the giants as companions of the Worthies. They also witnessed their genealogy in the reflection of the Herculean-like figures of antiquity and the Hebrew prophet-like giants, to contemporary regal types (reflecting the division of the Nine Worthies), stretching, like the transition from the classical past to medieval times, from the legendary matriarchal beginnings to the patriarchal knighthood. The giants, being liminal creatures between the wild and the courtly, between rejection and acceptance, could have served metaphorically to express the alter ego of the work's commissioners. It is little wonder therefore that from the fifteenth century onward, giants became the heraldic symbols of many of the *Ministerialer* in “the land in the mountains.”<sup>55</sup>

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54 Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, 245–55.

55 Rizzolli, “Riesige und wilde Tiroler Wappenhälter,” 183–88.

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## 2. St. Christopher the Giant: Imagining the Sublime in Fifteenth-Century South Tyrol

*Michal Ozeri*

### Abstract

Between the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, colossal depictions of giants appeared in the public spaces and pilgrimage routes of South Tyrol. While most of these giants had their origins in courtly literature, a notable exception emerged: the image of St. Christopher, whose vita was changed to portray him as a giant. Although giants were traditionally perceived as cursed, this new visual stratagem characterizing a saint as a giant, was seemingly peculiar. However, both were regarded as liminal beings, which saw notions of the “gigantic” acquiring new and positive spiritual connotations. Accordingly, when viewed against the backdrop of the Alpine landscape, these colossal images of Christopher appearing on the exterior of rural churches attest to the period’s understanding of the sublime.

**Keywords:** Alps, liminality, sublimity, pilgrimage churches, *mirabilia*, mermaid

In St. Nicholas Church in Merano, South Tyrol, a fifteenth-century colossal painted image of St. Christopher bearing Christ on his shoulders, and measuring about ten meters in height, features above the southern entrance, reaching the roof (figure 2.1). In his right hand the saint holds the miraculously blooming staff, one of his traditional attributes, taken from the fifth- and sixth-century written legends. As a later addition, a mermaid is shown between Christopher’s feet as he straddles a river (figure 2.2).<sup>1</sup> Such

<sup>1</sup> The giant saint was praying to God to let his staff bloom as proof of his divine mission: “[...] the blessed Rebrenus entered the house of the Lord, fixed his staff before the altar in front of the





Figure 2.1 *St. Christopher*, fifteenth century. Fresco, St. Nicholas Church, Merano, Italy. Photo: Michal Ozeri.

paintings of Christopher bearing Christ were highly popular in Europe in general and in the Alps in particular between the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. Indeed, Christopher's popularity led to a change in his long-standing literary image. Whereas in the visual arts in South Tyrol he had been portrayed as a giant already during the twelfth century, in his *vitae* and written legends his transformation into a giant occurred only during the thirteenth century. Moreover, while depictions of Christopher are usually located in the interior of a church, in the Alps they are mostly located on the exterior of buildings erected along Alpine roads, intentionally positioned on the particular side of a building that enables the image to function in concert with its mountain backdrop. I would like to suggest that these images, set against the background of imposing nature, are manifestations of this period's notion of the sublime.<sup>2</sup>

window and, falling prostrate, said in supplication: 'Lord, my God, make this staff blossom, if indeed You have called upon me to contemplate Your words.' And forthwith the staff blossomed"; "Passio Sancti Christophori Martyris," 396.

<sup>2</sup> This essay is drawn from my PhD dissertation, "The Giants of South Tyrol as a Visualization of the Medieval Sublime" (Tel Aviv University, forthcoming).



Figure 2.2 *St. Christopher with a Siren*, fifteenth century. Fresco, St. Nicholas Church, Merano, Italy. Photo: Assaf Pinkus.

This chapter examines how the colossal images of St. Christopher bearing Christ in his arms, which emerged along the Alpine pilgrimage roads of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, embodied and manifested notions of the sublime. I first discuss the transformation of Christopher as a giant, and the giant—previously a frightening and pagan opponent of God—as a

saint.<sup>3</sup> I then discuss the giant as a liminal figure connotating liminality and transgression, together with other notions of “beyond” that pertain to both giants and the sublime. This is followed by an examination of the concept of the sublime, demonstrating how Christopher, as both a saint and a giant, constitutes a superhuman being who possesses the ability to talk to God, influence nature, and perform miracles. Finally, I analyze the iconography of three prominent examples—St. Martin Church in Zillis, St. Thomas Church in Weintental, and St. Nicholas Church in Merano—focusing on the depictions of Christopher and his accompanying *mirabilia* as expressions of the sublime. I argue that, as the pilgrims journeyed through the Alps, these colossal images of the giant-saint, when viewed in concert with sublime nature, were intended to inspire awe in their beholders, encouraging them to experience the authority of God.

## The Giant St. Christopher: From Image to Text

During the Middle Ages and up to the sixteenth century, giants as a visual and literary topos constituted an important cultural issue in Europe in general and in the German-speaking lands in particular. Whereas in the courtly literature and theology, giants are perceived as a violent, arrogant, and damned race that is usually beyond redemption, in the visual arts they appear as somewhat submissive, protective, and even majestic.<sup>4</sup> This new and different approach is reflected, for example, in the pair of giants flanking the apse of the church of Kastelaz (both of which adopt an Atlas-like posture as shown in figure 1.9), in the many depictions of St. Christopher and of the hero Roland, and in the giants on the Schloss Runkelstein balcony (figures 1.2 and 1.3).<sup>5</sup> Thus the visual arts in the later Middle Ages took giants in a new direction, and the art of the German-speaking lands, in particular, employed these novel visual types to give form to the medieval concept of the sublime. Whereas those giants were anchored in the Arthurian romances and Nordic mythology, through the change in St. Christopher’s image as

3 On giants as idolators and as God’s evil opponents, see Augustine, *City of God*, 15:23, 16:3; Cassian, *Conferences*, 21:7; Saint Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 41, 142; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 8:11; Rupert of Deutz, “On the Trinity and Its Works,” 91–94; and Honorius of Autun, *Old Norse Elucidarius*, 2:23, 2:75.

4 For a full discussion on giants see Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*.

5 For the giants see Pinkus, “ein rise starc unde grôz,” “Giant of Bremen,” and his chapter 1 of this volume.

expressed in the visual arts of South Tyrol, giants could now also become associated with Christian sainthood.

The legends of St. Christopher were written in Byzantium and adopted by the West, remaining unchanged until his character was reframed as chivalric in the twelfth century.<sup>6</sup> It was in these early legends, preserved in the anonymous eleventh-century *Passio Sancti Christophori Martyris*, that Christopher acquired his blooming staff as proof of his divine mission.<sup>7</sup> His legend recounts that, after being imprisoned for a period for his Christian beliefs, Christopher agreed to go on a journey, at the end of which he was to face the idolater king. On his journey he converted the king's soldiers, who were then all baptized. The narrative later recounts that the saint was beheaded at the order of the king, but that before his beheading he prayed for the safety and well-being of God's servants, and a voice answered his prayers. Based on these legends Christopher became the patron saint of nomads and pilgrims.<sup>8</sup>

Featured in the most prominent locations on churches along travelers' routes, the frescoed images of Christopher reflected the belief that those who had seen them would not die of *mala mors* (bad death, i.e., "without sacrament") that day. His gigantic size thus became an inherent visual feature of the saint's apotropaic and protective functions and identity.<sup>9</sup> Although Christopher's original name had been Rebrebus (which derives from the Aramaic word *rabrab*, meaning "big" or "tall"), his size was never a central part of his literary character, nor was he described as gigantic. Across the Alps, however, Christopher is usually depicted bearing an adult figure of Christ, stressing the saint's gigantic proportions and illustrating his Christianized name, meaning the "Bearer of Christ."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, until the renewal of his image in the mid-twelfth-century Germanic texts, Christopher had been portrayed as a cynocephalus (*et quasi canino capite*), as in the *Passio Sancti Christophori Martyris*.<sup>11</sup> His identity as either a giant or a cynocephalus (which possesses a dog's head and barks), corresponds

6 For the German legend, see Schönbach, "Sanct Christopherus." By the eighth century, there were at least three copies of his Passion, in Autun, Turin, and Würzburg. See Jacoby, "Christophorus, hl," in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, 2:66. See also Woernle, *Christophorus in der Schweiz*, 6–7, and Pridgeon, "Saint Christopher Wall Paintings in English and Welsh Churches," 6–7.

7 *Passio Sancti Christophori Martyris*, 396.

8 *Ibid.*, 401–5.

9 Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 43–44.

10 Only after Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* did some of the Alpine St. Christopher images begin to depict an infant Christ; see discussion below.

11 *Passio Sancti Christophori Martyris*, 395.



Figure 2.3 *St. Christopher Surrounded by a City*, ca. 1162. Swabian Codex of Zwiefalten Abbey. Cod. Hist. fol. 415, fol. 50r. Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart. Photo: Württembergische Landesbibliothek.

to the “condemned” or “outcast” Latin meaning of his original name, and as the Other from a Christian perspective.<sup>12</sup> Since his initial popularity in Western art, however, Christopher has usually been depicted with human facial features.

There is nonetheless visual evidence of St. Christopher as a cynocephalus in a twelfth-century manuscript produced at Wienhausen Abbey, in which the haloed and dog-headed Christopher stands amid the architecture of a tiny city (figure 2.3). Christopher appears taller than the towers of the fortified city whose walls barely rise above his boots; one foot is shown prominently, emerging from an opening in the wall. The text may not describe the saint as gigantic, but the illustration clearly does, thereby inverting the traditional relationship between image and text.<sup>13</sup> It was Christopher’s

12 Friedrich, “Travail Narratives,” 12–55; Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 44; Lavin, *Place of Narrative*, 164–66, 335 n. 27.

13 Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 44. Here, however, I would disagree with Stephens who argues that the gigantic image of Christopher does not make him a true giant.

visual rendition that led to the transformation of his character from that of a cynocephalus to that of a giant in contemporary mid-twelfth-century Germanic texts, and this new character was adopted in the mid-thirteenth century *Legenda aurea* (Golden Legend), granting it theological depth. According to this legend, Christopher had served the Lord by carrying people across a river—an allegory for baptism—until one day Jesus himself asked the giant to carry him across the water (manifesting the latter's epithet as the "Bearer of Christ"). This popular narrative constituted the first textual influence on the saint's iconography, which often added to the giant-saint's image a river with fish at his feet, and occasionally also *mirabilia* (marvels and wonders of nature such as hybrids).<sup>14</sup> In spite of Christopher's popularity and his depiction with human facial features, gigantism still bore implications of evil and idolatry and thus also evoked rebellion against God.<sup>15</sup> Visually embodying both virtue and vice, the saint's image remained problematic. In effect, as a giant, Christopher remained inherently linked to the pagan past.

## The Liminality of Giants in the High and Late Middle Ages

According to the Book of Genesis (6:4) giants resulted from transgression, from a taboo coupling of "the sons of God and daughters of humans." This enigmatic phrase engendered various exegetical writings that explain the giants as an abomination, as the offspring of a forbidden union.<sup>16</sup> Both Jewish and Christian theologians pointed to giants as the cause of the Flood, perceiving them as manifesting the pinnacle of human wickedness.<sup>17</sup> All this had happened at the dawn of civilization when, according to the Scriptures and both Greek and Nordic mythologies, the first age ended with a flood that covered the earth. Miraculously, however, the giants survived.<sup>18</sup>

14 Giants themselves, by virtue of their size, were also considered to be *mirabilia*.

15 Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 66–69; Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 124; Boyer, *Giant Hero*, 36–39, 58–60.

16 Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 76–84; Cohen, *Of Giants*, 52–53.

17 See White, *Topics of Discourse*, 161; Cohen, *Of Giants*, 19; and Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 74–75. For a broad perspective of meanings and interpretations of the deluge that are beyond the scope of the present study, see Lewis, *Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*; Martínez García and Luttikhuisen, *Interpretations of the Flood*; and Dean, "World Grown Old," 562.

18 For Ogyges's deluge in Greek mythology, see Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, 87–88. Africanus is quoted in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, 489b, book x.10; and for Bergelmir's flood in Nordic mythology, see *Gylfaginning*, 7 in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 11.

The subsequent era was that of humankind, which pushed the giants from the center to the margins. Based on stories from the Old Testament (e.g., Numbers 13:22, Deuteronomy 2:10–11, Deuteronomy 3:11, and Samuel 1:17–18), giants dwelt on the periphery of human settlements. In agreement with the Bible, in travel literature such as *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (ca. 1356), the giants were said to mark the edges of civilization.<sup>19</sup> In Norse mythology, the wilderness surrounding human habitats was considered the dwelling place not only of giants, but also of other *mirabilia*, such as mermaids.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, in the Middle High German epics, it was giants who created the earth.<sup>21</sup> When traveling in the wilderness or at the edges of the known world, travelers who looked at the landscape and recognized the giant in it conferred upon giants the appeal of eternity, requiring that those who beheld them expand their perspective of time to that of timelessness. On the one hand, giants as mortal beings belonged to the dawn of the world and were supposed to have been long gone. On the other hand, giants were recognized as integral to the landscape, their enormous bodies projected onto it and immortalized in geography as they surmounted the limits of human life. Thus, with their hybridity, miraculous ability to survive, longevity, enormous size, and unique connection with nature, the existence of giants differed from human experience.

From the Christian perspective, the notion of Otherness as distinguished from humankind is intertwined with the notion of being separated from God.<sup>22</sup> Giants were regarded accordingly. Following the writings of St. Augustine (354–430) and Isidore of Seville (560–636), during the High and Late Middle Ages giants were perceived as a stupid, greedy, and cruel race of super-hunters who preferred looting their neighbors to hard work, and as devilish creatures that generated demigods and devils that possessed idols.<sup>23</sup> Honorius of Autun (1080–1154), for example, wrote that idolatry started with the Tower of Babel built under the rule of the giant

19 *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 173; Pinkus, "Giant of Bremen," 403–4.

20 In the Middle Ages and early modern periods mermaids, sirens, and nixies, as well as fairies and female elves often had the same role; see Classen, "World of Hybrid Women," 441, 444; and Leclercq-Marx, *La sirène*, 69–87.

21 In *Edda*, for example, Ymir's mortal remains created the earth: "Out of him made the earth, out of his blood, the sea and the lakes. The earth was made of the flesh and the rocks of the bones, stone and scree they made out of the teeth and molars and of the bones that had been broken ... they also took his skull and made out of it the sky"; Sturluson, *Edda*, 12.

22 Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 113–14.

23 Augustine, *City of God*, 15:23, 16:3; Cassian, *Conferences*, 21:7; Rupert of Deutz, *On the Trinity*, 91–94; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 8:11; Honorius of Autun, *Elucidarius*, 2:23, 2:75; and Saint Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 41, 142.

Nimrod. He added that Nimrod's successor was the first in history to erect a statue of his father for his subjects to venerate and that he was also the first to set out to conquer his neighbors.<sup>24</sup> Giants were also regarded as not fully *gente* (human), but as *animalia* (creatures) with only minor reasoning ability.<sup>25</sup>

Many of the giant's characteristics in theology also featured in the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic mythologies. In the Northern mythologies, however, these characteristics mostly related to their enormous bodies soaring beyond human scale, rather than their distance from God's grace.<sup>26</sup> The Nordic notion of giants derived from the bond between giants and the earth. Although giants had evil and bestial connotations in Nordic culture which saw the world as created from a giant's corpse, their unique status as primordial material accorded them a sublime aura not present in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Middle High German legends, peculiarities in the landscape are frequently attributed to giants in the local folklore which likewise granted them a primordial character: a footprint becomes a lake; a fight between two giants originates a huge rock pile; giants dig a cave through a rock, create hot springs, and the like.<sup>27</sup> Based upon its unique mountainous topography, beginning in the twelfth century, the Tyrol became known in legends as the *Land im Gebirge*—the giants' homeland.<sup>28</sup> Giants were perceived to dwell in proximity to nature and were linked to unpredictable geological and meteorological phenomena such as earthquakes, storms, and blizzards.<sup>29</sup> This tie between nature and giants as the "race" that shaped the landscape implies that giants are participants in the sublime.<sup>30</sup> When the northern lands were Christianized, a new *ordo mundi* was created, retaining the role and place of giants in the Creation in both the pagan and Christian traditions, with giants becoming the first point of translating the Northern myths into exegetical *lingua Christianitatis*.<sup>31</sup>

24 Honorius of Autun, *Old Norse Elucidarius*, 2:23, 2:75; Augustine, *City of God*, 16.3; and Saint Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 41,142.

25 Augustine, *City of God*, 15.23; and Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 68.

26 Cohen, *Of Giants*, xii.

27 Broderius, "Giant in Germanic Tradition," 16–19, 34–36, 65–70; Stewart, *On Longing*, 70–75; and Mahlschedl (Ritter von Alpburg), *Mythen und Sagen Tirols*, 34 nn. 12–35.

28 Stampfer and Steppan, *Die Romanische Wandmalerei in Tirol*, 11–12.

29 Martin, *Sagen-Kränzlein aus Tirol*, 177–82; von Günther, *Tales and Legends of the Tyrol*, 12–15; and Broderius, "Giant in Germanic Tradition," 88–94.

30 Stewart, *On Longing*, 70–75, and Cohen, *Of Giants*, 5–6.

31 Cohen, *Of Giants*, 15–16.



The giants' characteristics, behaviors, and appearance as the antagonist Other are apparent also in the literature of the High Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, their ugliness, as portrayed in the courtly literature, reflects their evil character and links them to satanic forces.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as shown by Tina Boyer, they are also referred to as the "great devil" (*grózen vřlant*) and depicted accordingly.<sup>34</sup> In the Middle High German epic *Younger Sigenot*, from the *Dietrich* cycle, the giant Sigenot is described in highly negative terms: "His legs were like pillars. His armor was very dark reaching almost to his knees with leather straps woven into it. Bad breath came out of his throat as if the wind was blowing. His mouth was large and his eyes were red like fire."<sup>35</sup> This description incorporates many signifiers of the giants' character: their pillar-like legs refer to their legendary reputation as builders; their armor connotes warrior abilities; the leather straps suggest they are super-hunters; their wind-like breath associates them with meteorological phenomena; the large mouth implies their brutishness and greed; and their eyes like fire suggest demons or hell.

Accordingly, in both religious and secular texts the giants' characteristics generally reflect theological and historiographic conventions, which also assigned them inferior intelligence and brutishness. In the *Divine Comedy* (1320), Dante Alighieri references the giants' architectonic similarities to portray them as prideful beings. Mistaking the giants in *Inferno* (31) for towers, he is corrected by Virgil: "I said: 'Master, tell me, what city is this?'... you should be told: these are not towers, but giants."<sup>36</sup> Dante's giants are thus based on Augustine's and Honorius of Autun's association of pride with the giant Nimrod, who, in opposing the Lord, had manifested irredeemable treachery, building the Tower of Babel in an attempt to reach God.<sup>37</sup> And when Virgil and Dante move from the eighth circle (where the sinners of fraud are punished) to the ninth circle (where the sinners of treachery are punished), the giants are there, bridging the valley between the circles and, by extension, connecting the harshest sins and characteristics of giants,

32 Boyer, *Giant Hero*, 39–43.

33 Ibid., 51.

34 *Younger Sigenot*, 60.2, translated in Boyer, *Giant Hero*, 58.

35 Boyer, *Giant Hero*, 61, 1–9, with translation at 58. Although this is quoted from *Younger Sigenot* (ca. 1250), Boyer recognizes a new figure of the giant that emerged in the courtly literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Retaining the giant's antagonistic character, although it could represent virtue and vice concomitantly, it ultimately portrayed the giant as an evil minion. For a full discussion on giants in the courtly literature, see *ibid.*, especially 39–43; 107–8.

36 Dante, *Inferno*, 31:21–32.

37 Honorius of Autun, *Elucidarius*, 2:75; Augustine, *City of God*, 16:5, and Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 67–68.

Fraud and Treachery.<sup>38</sup> In his commentary on the *Divine Comedy* (1324–28), Jacopo della Lana went on to articulate Dante's division between man and giant. Using the Aristotelian distinction between men, giants, and brute beasts, he argued that giants share reason and free will with men, and their size and strength with whales and elephants; they are thus a liminal, intermediary category between man and beast, possessing the qualities of excessive pride and *mal volere* (ill will), qualities that are particular to giants.

Giants are thus liminal beings in many of their features: they live and act in liminal territories between human settlements and what was then considered the edges of the world; they occupy a category between humans and monsters; they are concomitantly primordial and contemporary; and, due to their life force, they survive all. Thus, by implication, they are miraculously supernatural Other and timeless beings, qualities that, as mentioned, are markers of the sublime.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, although other *mirabilia*, such as mermaids, pygmies, dragons, etc., share some of the giants' liminal qualities, it seems that none of them quite match them. Surprisingly, however, the giants' liminality matches that of the saints: both perform miracles and are thus perceived as superhuman; both can influence the natural world; and both enjoy the phenomenon of timelessness.<sup>40</sup> These similarities notwithstanding, there is one significant difference between the two. While the giants had existed since the creation of the world and had remained on the edges of human time, the saints belong first and foremost to the age of humankind, into which they were born. They also belong to eternity, as God has rewarded them by granting them eternal life by his side in his heavenly kingdom.<sup>41</sup> This reward is due to the saints operating as vessels of God: they perform miracles in his name, they fast, they pray, and they convert many to Christianity to enlarge God's community. Giants, in

38 Dante names the giants who had revolted against God or the Greek gods: Nimrod, Ephialtes, and Briareus; he also names Antaeus, who was born later and so did not revolt; Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 68.

39 On the notion of supernatural otherness, see Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others."

40 While performing miracles is based upon esoteric knowledge that can easily be linked to the giants' familiarity with the natural landscape of the wilderness, giants were also believed to possess knowledge of weaponry, the forging of bronze and iron, and of marvelous building methods, see Emerson, "Legends of Cain," 888–905; Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 77; Dean, "World Grown Old," 561; and Cassian, *Conferences*, 21:7. For saints, see Jacobus, *Legenda aurea*, 62–71 n. 12, and 238–42 n. 58; and Matzke, "Contributions to the History of the Legend of Saint George," 136–37.

41 For detailed discussions on saints and their powers, see Brown, *Cult of the Saints*; Geary, *Furta Sacra*; and Bagnoli, *Treasures of Heaven*.

contrast, *compete* with God, transgressing all His rules and commands, and performing their own miraculous feats in arrogance to acquire prestige and awe, while striving to dominate through terror. Thus, while both saints and giants occupy the realm of the sublime, they are essentially contradictory entities.<sup>42</sup> In Christianity's view, the giants' lives express the Christian vices, while the saints' vitae express the Christian virtues and constitute a model for the believers. Accordingly, Christopher the saint functions as a liminal figure who bridges more than just two river banks: his gigantism connects heaven and earth, while his origins as both a giant and a cynocephalus offer a link between paganism and Christianity. As will be shown, these ideas are expressed in the colossal images of Christopher shown straddling a river, bearing Christ in his arms, and with a *mirabilium* between his feet.

### Generating the Sublime: The Gigantic, Nature, and St. Christopher

As noted, sublimity's key trait is liminality, which is a common factor to many markers of the sublime: connoting a place beyond, crossing a border, transgression, immense heights, gaps and, by implication, those eternal qualities that are shared with giants and saints alike such as infinity, timelessness, the wonderful, and the miraculous.<sup>43</sup> As a fundamental concept in philosophical aesthetics, the sublime concerns both nature and art—albeit to varying degrees at different times—characterizing an experience of elevation that is beyond the human in scale or scope. The concept of the sublime is rooted in the classical rhetoric, philosophy, and art of ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>44</sup> In this context, the sublime was strongly related to nature and to religion since the ancient gods were manifestations of the natural world and its elements, which became popular themes in literature and the visual arts.<sup>45</sup> The oldest surviving treatise on the sublime is the Greek fragment *Peri*

42 This idea is fully developed in my PhD dissertation.

43 Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*, 51–53.

44 On classical notions of the sublime, see *ibid.*

45 In “Error Left Me and Fear Came in Its Place,” Stoppino examines the medieval conception of the gigantic as sublime, arguing that Dante depicts his and Virgil's visit to purgatory in the *Divine Comedy* as an explicitly sublime experience. Stoppino notes, among other things, that Dante's depiction of the purgatorial giants is fragmentary, indicating the relatively limited bounds of human capacity in the face of the giants' immense, unbounded size as sublime objects. Thus, Dante's presentation of giants as embodiments of nature—vast in scale and unable to be perceived as a whole—demonstrates a sublime description in a medieval context. Stoppino, however, mostly bases her readings of giants on eighteenth-century notions of the sublime: she

*hýpsous* (On the Sublime), attributed to Longinus.<sup>46</sup> The classical sublime experience is two-fold: the *object* (something of great excellence or beauty, large in intensity or size); and the *subject* (someone in whom the sublime effect—an overwhelming sense of awe or other high emotion—takes place). While the *object* is generally discussed as an aesthetic theoretical conception, the *subject* is part of a transcendental experience that is rooted in nature and mystical or religious belief and practice.<sup>47</sup> In agreement with these notions of the classical sublime, in the Nordic tradition the Alps provide a setting for miraculous adventures and a place where magic could happen, while simultaneously encompassing an element of danger.<sup>48</sup> However, not only in pagan traditions but in the Scriptures too, the wilderness, due to its otherworldliness, was perceived as a place that welcomes visions and is “the source of all charisma and theophany.”<sup>49</sup> This is expressed in the experiences of the Old Testament prophets who miraculously received God’s prophesies upon entering the wilderness, such as when Elijah escaped Jezebel, fleeing into the wilderness and arriving at Mount Horeb to experience the sublime in God’s revelation to him (I Kings 19:4–13).

This notion became a religious practice that resonates in the medieval undertaking of a devotional journey through the wilderness. Moreover, similar to the classical tradition, Augustine perceived the sublime as essential for mental growth.<sup>50</sup> He described reading the Scriptures as an intentional act that expanded his mind and led him to ultimately find the sublime, the grace

follows Immanuel Kant in situating the sublime within the perception of the subject. While her essay is highly compelling, she does not engage with classical or medieval texts on the sublime.

46 Although there is no agreement on dating or author, these are the usual dates given in scholarship and for the sake of convenience, I will continue to refer to the author as Longinus. See also Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*, xvii–xx, 2–3; Mazzucchi, “La tradizione manoscritta del Περί Ὑψους”; Vettori, *Petri Victorii Variarum lectionum*, 9; Canna, *Della sublimità*, 9; and Doran, *Theory of the Sublime*, 97. The *Peri hypsous* was seemingly ignored during medieval times, but it was included in a tenth-century Byzantine manuscript which also incorporated Pseudo Aristotle’s *Problems*; the manuscript was “discovered” in the Florentine library of the Italian cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi (1501–1550) and published in *edito princeps* in Greek by the Italian humanist Francesco Robortello in 1554. The text was translated into English in 1652 but only gained wider readership following the French translation by Nicolas Boileaus in 1674, thereafter becoming an influential work on aesthetics and philosophical thought. For the Greek text and its standard analysis, see Russell, *Longinus: On the Sublime*.

47 For a deeper grasp of the sublime as a concept and an experience, see Doran, *Theory of the Sublime*, and Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*.

48 Classen, “Role of the Forest,” 150, 160, and Herlihy, “Attitudes toward the Environment,” 109.

49 See Classen, “Role of the Forest,” 149–50, and Le Goff, *Medieval Imagination*, 51–52.

50 Doran, *Theory of the Sublime*, 60; Shanzer, “Incessu Humilem, Successu Excelsam,” 51–79; and Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*, 68–69.

of God, for whom he longed.<sup>51</sup> This devotional component of the sublime is clearly evident in the doctrine of Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), who describes the elevation of the mind in contemplation according to three stages of anagogic modes of ecstasy.<sup>52</sup> The notion of the sublime as an expansion of the mind, although rooted in Platonic philosophy, is closer to the medieval concept than to the classical one, and gained momentum later on in Neoplatonism, Hermetic philosophy, and Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Hence, it is no surprise that Stephen Jaeger refers to the Christian spiritual journey in cartographical terms: "The Christian topography of contemplative experience begins at the lower, earthly realm, and rises."<sup>54</sup> The journey taken by pilgrims across the Alps, escorted by images of the giant Christopher bearing Christ in his arms, can thus be perceived as precisely such a sublime path to redemption.

Humanity's most fundamental relationship with the gigantic is articulated in its rapport with surrounding nature.<sup>55</sup> Susan Stewart argues that we move through the landscape, aware of its status as gigantic, but capable of only a fragmental perception of it. Our articulation of the landscape is thus a projection of that fragmentation: the mouth of a river, the foothills, etc., reflect the giants' primordial nature because these topographical features have been attributed to the activity of giants, who preceded humanity.<sup>56</sup> Through this marked connection between nature and giants, Stewart locates the giant in the realm of the sublime.<sup>57</sup>

In order to explore the creation of the sublime as it relates to Christopher's colossal images, we need to return to the classical age. As opposed to the eighteenth-century's subjective reading of the sublime, James Porter resituates the sublime in both the *Object* and the *Subject*, arguing that the sublime is in "the logic of the expression, the forces it sets in motion, its dynamism and energy, and the ideas and images it conjures up in the mind of a beholder."<sup>58</sup> Rather than placing stress solely on the *subject's*

51 As he writes: "With what passion, my God, with what great passion I longed to fly away from earthly things to you"; Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.5.9.

52 See Richard of St. Victor, *Twelve Patriarchs*, 316. In much the same way, Boitani views the entire maritime voyage, across a vast and boundless sea, toward God in Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a manifestation of the sublime; *Tragic and the Sublime*, 253, 258–61.

53 Jaeger, *Sense of the Sublime*, 165.

54 Ibid.

55 Stewart, *On Longing*, 71.

56 Ibid., 71–72.

57 Ibid., 70–75.

58 Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*, 7–12. This emphasis of the subject mainly results from Monk's 1935 study of eighteenth-century theories of the sublime, in which he stresses its effect far more than technical ability or style; *Sublime*, 10–12.

overwhelming sense of awe, this classical notion of a two-fold sublimity enables [or leads to?] a broader understanding of the sublime in general and demonstrates a diverse use of sublime *objects*, thus helping to reveal how the medieval sublime diverged from its pagan heritage. Drawing upon classical ideas, reproduced in the late Middle Ages and early modern context, artworks could be created to produce the sublime experience by using the viewer's perception of nature's grand yet perilous motifs, including the immense heights, liminal zones, intense dangers, and dramatic forces that characterize the Alpine landscape. To create the necessary appearance of effortlessness and spontaneity at the core of the sublime experience, art and nature must be joined. The staging of this union however, must remain concealed. As Longinus explains, although nature is "a first and primary element of creation ... it is method (Art) that is competent to provide and contribute quantities and appropriate occasions for each thing."<sup>59</sup>

As discussed, between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries the sublime (which ultimately derives from God) was primarily understood based on two interwoven notions: marvelous nature and its *mirabilia*, which surrounded the human sphere and which could be encountered both physically and spiritually; and the journey as an expansion of the mind.

### Viewing St. Christopher: The Alpine Landscape as a Sublime Setting

While representations of a giant Christopher mainly feature in the interior of sanctuaries both north and south of the Alps, in the Tyrol he is typically depicted on exterior church walls, with no one specific direction of view, thus addressing pilgrims from different vantage points. At St. John Church in Taufers (ca. 1200) (figure 2.4) and St. Martin Church in Zillis (ca. 1300), he is featured on the western walls (figure 2.5); at sixteenth-century St. Thomas Church in Weintental/Vallarga he appears on the eastern polygonal apse (figure 2.6); and at fifteenth-century St. Nicolas Church in Merano he is on the southern wall (see again figure 2.1). Hence, his representation should be interpreted in conjunction with the grand mountains that form its backdrop. This Tyrolean association with the natural environment is an integral component of the discussion of the sublime and St. Christopher.

The Alps present a unique and highly dramatic topography that combines mountain ridges, snowy slopes, waterfalls, forests, meadows, rivers, high

59 Longinus, *On the Sublime* 2.2; translated in Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*, 66.



Figure 2.4 *St. Christopher*, late twelfth, early thirteenth century. Fresco, St. John Church, Taufers, Italy. Photo: Michal Ozeri.



Figure 2.5 *St. Martin Church* viewed against mountain backdrop, Zillis, Switzerland. Photo: Michal Ozeri.



Figure 2.6 *St. Christopher with a Mermaid and Other Mirabilia*, sixteenth century. Fresco, St. Thomas Church, Weitental, Italy. Photo: Johanna Bampi.

rocky peaks, and glaciers. The landscape thus bears many of the markers of the sublime, such as immense heights, liminal zones, and forces that counter nature's laws.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the variations in elevation and exposure in the mountain range produce extreme differences in climate, with frequent heavy mists, snowstorms, and landslides bestowing a sense of otherworldly spirituality on a region fraught with potential danger for its inhabitants and travelers alike. This ethereal landscape had traditionally lent itself to sacred rituals. As early as the end of the Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age, for example, there were many sites of cultic fire practices located high up in the Alps. In Roman times, with the construction of the Via Claudia Augusta, additional pagan cult sites appeared along the road, with Christian sanctuaries being built on top of both kinds of sacred locations in the early years of Christianity.<sup>61</sup>

60 Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*, 51–53.

61 For extensive reading on fire practices, see Lorandi, "Devozioni nella Venosta medioevale"; and Steiner, *Alpine Brandopferplätze*.



The sublime traits of the unique Alpine landscape were recognized as early as the eighth century by the monks of St. Gall monastery, who described the solitude of this place as “the end of the world.”<sup>62</sup> Later, around 1200, this admiration was expressed in the *Passio Placidi*: “The deep solitude, the looming mountains, the pleasant meadows, the dense forests, the alluring mountain streams, and the glory of the Rhine running past.”<sup>63</sup> These elements express ideas such as timelessness, rejuvenation, and immense force, which are all part of the sublimity of nature.

When seeking to create and transmit the sublime, therefore, these ideas require an image that expresses them, such as that of the giant Christopher. Not only does his colossal image exceed all human scale, but his unique connection to nature, both as a giant pre-dating humankind and shaping the Tyrolean landscape, and as a saint who channels the word of God who had given him a miraculously blooming rod, renders Christopher part of the sublime. In this sense, his unique liminality, combined with the traditional Alpine homeland of the giants, can visually articulate the pagan sublime as a Christian concept, as it is in St. Martin Church in Zillis, in which Christopher’s sublime saintliness appears to validate his (pagan) sublime gigantism.

At an altitude of about 1,000 meters, St. Martin Church stands on a flat plateau, contrasting with the steep and narrow Schams valley and close to three important Alpine passes (figure 2.5). The saint features there on the church’s exterior wall, where he measures about six meters (almost twenty feet) in height, similar to Jacobus de Voragine’s description of Christopher as “XII cubitos in longitudine.”<sup>64</sup> Although it is difficult to see today because of damage to the fresco, he is shown standing on dry land rather than in water, holding a staff split into three roots at the base, indicating that the top was originally blooming (like the ones shown with Christopher in Taufers (figure 2.4) and Merano (see again figure 2.1); in his left hand, Christopher supports the smaller figure of Christ.<sup>65</sup> No mermaid is depicted between Christopher’s feet. Thus, other than his gigantism, Christopher has no pagan attributes and the fact that he bears Christ manifests the ultimate conversion of the “Giant of Cena’an” [Canaan] (as de Voragine calls him) to Christianity. However, fantastic creatures do appear inside the church: the

62 Müller, “Die Anfänge des Klosters Disentis,” 62; translated in Jerris, “Alpine Sanctuaries,” 3.

63 Müller, “Passio S. Placidi (c. 1200),” 165; translated in Jerris, “Alpine Sanctuaries,” 4–5.

64 Jacobus, *Legenda aurea*, 430.

65 For a brief discussion on the iconography of the blooming staff, see Woernle, *Christophorus in der Schweiz*, 11.

ceiling features a parade of sea-hybrids, thus maintaining the close relation between the saint and the world of *mirabilia*.

St. Christopher, on this Alpine road, represents a giant who evokes a past of pagan mythology but is now fully redeemed, bearing Christ in both his name and his arms (as noted by de Voragine). In so doing, he obtains his salvation and, for the first time, the divine approval of his gigantism. Devotees viewing the church façade with the giant St. Christopher would have perceived him much like a lighthouse of grace in the wilderness, contributing to a distinct sense of providence, marking both the rule of God and a site of rest and repose amid the chaos of nature.

Depictions of Christopher, like the one from fifteenth-century Merano, more than a century after Zillis (ca.1300), naturally underwent change, and with them expressions of the sublime changed as well. While in Zillis ecclesiastical art had tended to obscure Christopher's pagan origins by focusing on him bearing Christ, the mermaid displayed together with Christopher's colossal image, as for example in Merano, constituted a specific reference to the region's pagan past. Fish and several sea-hybrid *mirabilia* are also occasionally depicted in the river by Christopher's feet, as in the 1330–35 choir of Wienhausen Abbey, the 1490 fresco of St. Nicholas Church in Merano (figure 2.7) and the sixteenth-century fresco in the parish church of St. Thomas in Weitental (figure 2.8). However, the most common of all *mirabilia* featuring with the giant St. Christopher is that of the mermaid. Similar to the giants, in both the Nordic and Latin traditions the siren-cum-mermaid was perceived as occupying the realm of the sublime, along with other kinds of *mirabilia*, which traditionally all dwelt in the magical wilderness beyond the human sphere.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, mermaids are known to appear only to travelers in transition between their point of departure and their destination, in liminal places, such as in lakes and rivers along the roads.<sup>67</sup> Like Christopher, mermaids are also apotropaic figures, and in Nordic popular belief they are the protectors of children.<sup>68</sup> In German literature, mermaids are mostly positive characters, perceived as enchanting figures that can foretell the future and magically assist people on their path. Thus an encounter with them, albeit ephemeral, is an experience of happiness and transformation, as seen in the *Nibelungenlied*, where three

66 Such as ghosts, mermaids, fairies, and dragons; see Classen, "World of Hybrid Women," 441.

67 For mermaids appearing in liminal places, see Goodrich, "Fairy, Elves and the Enchanted Otherworld," 433.

68 Meier discusses mermaids as apotropaic figures in Nordic traditions in "Christophorus und die Nixe," 138.



Figure 2.7 Mermaid, detail of *St. Christopher with a Siren*, fifteenth century. Fresco, St. Nicholas Church, Merano, Italy. Photo: Assaf Pinkus.



Figure 2.8 Mermaid, detail of *St. Christopher with a Mermaid and Other Mirabilia*, sixteenth century. Fresco, St. Thomas Church, Weintental, Italy. Photo: Johanna Bampi.

mermaids help the heroic warrior Hagen trick the ferryman and cross the river.<sup>69</sup> Christian theology, however, mostly relates mermaids to the sirens depicted in the *Odyssey* as seductive creatures filled with pagan divine knowledge that may cause humans to go astray.<sup>70</sup> Being the bearers of false knowledge, they are signifiers of sin and lead to heresy.<sup>71</sup> As such, from early Christianity on the *Odyssey* was viewed as an allegory of the true believers' earthly quest before reuniting with God: Odysseus is the believer, and the sirens are the lustful creatures that tempt men into evil, intentionally driving them to ruin and lulling them into the sleep of death.<sup>72</sup>

Dante similarly uses the siren in the *Divine Comedy* as a signifier of sin.<sup>73</sup> Dante too strays from the straight path and his journey is arduous, as a consequence of his ethical and moral choices.<sup>74</sup> The siren's opposite moral pole is that of Dante's beloved Beatrice, and although Beatrice and the siren represent sacred love and profane love respectively, Dante the poet rewrites and constantly chips away at these two initially resolute figures, establishing both contradictory and complementary relations between them, thus, exploiting the aspect of the siren's liminality to enable sufficient moral flexibility, to avert sin (to some extent).<sup>75</sup>

A similar reading can be applied to the mermaid-siren's appearance in St. Nicholas Church in Merano: above the southern entrance, reaching the roof, Christopher is depicted straddling a river, with a mermaid between his feet, ergo, positioning her immediately above the entrance, close to the devotees (see again figure 2.2).<sup>76</sup> Unlike Christopher, who has undergone a metamorphosis from a pagan dog-headed giant to a redeemed giant who holds Christ, the mermaid remains a hybrid entity, manifesting duality.<sup>77</sup> On the one hand, she can be perceived in her Christian traditional role as

69 Stanzas 1541–49 in Burton, *Das Nibelungenlied Song of the Nibelungs*, 214–15; and see Classen, "World of Hybrid Women," 450–51.

70 "For we [i.e., the sirens] know all the toils ... endured through the will of the gods, and we know all things that come to pass upon the fruitful earth"; Homer, *Odyssey*, XII, 189–91.

71 See Travis, "Of Sirens and Onocentaurs," 32–43; Leclercq-Marx, *La sirène*, 60, 63; and Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, 362–64.

72 Tucker, *Homo Viator*, 90; and for a complete scholastic background, Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, 376–86.

73 Classen, "World of Hybrid Women," 466–67, and Holmes, "Dante's Two Beloved," 28–29.

74 Holmes, "Dante's Two Beloved," 25.

75 This coupling is just one of several that Holmes refers to as part of her perspective on Dante's entire corpus of work; "Dante's Two Beloveds," especially 36–40.

76 While it is not common in the Alps, in French Romanesque churches, there are numerous mermaids on the entrance capitals; see Heyman, "Sirens Chanting in Auvergne-Velay."

77 Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 28–30.

an underminer of the ultimate Christian truth, being filled with pagan knowledge that may lead believers astray; on the other hand, her graceful appearance matches her role as a mystical helper, as a warning to the believers against straying from the true path, and leading them to the church entrance below her. In and of itself the visual relations between the towering Christopher as a converted giant, and the mermaid at his feet as an enchanting pagan hybrid, indicate that God as the origin of all sublime expressions soars above the pagan sublime, albeit without crushing it completely, but appropriating it, by means of the mermaid. At the same time, she functions as a visual sign of the liminal state of the believers at the door of the church, as she exists between the giant's feet facing the believers, inviting them to enter the house of the Lord and participate in God's order as a redeemed Christian. Thus, the mermaid's positioning indicates Christian superiority, expressing the ultimate divine order: at the top is Christ; in the middle, the redeemed giant; and, at the bottom, the mermaid, who as a hybrid belongs to the realm of the sublime but does not participate in the divine order, remaining at the entrance to both Christopher's feet and the church door.

In the sixteenth-century fresco on the exterior wall of St. Thomas Church in Weitental/Vallarga, there is a mermaid at Christopher's knee (see figure 2.6). In contrast to Merano's naked pagan mermaid, this one appears to have been Christianized as she has passed between Christopher's feet in his "baptizing river" and is positioned in the water further back. Her "baptism" is also suggested by her pious appearance in red attire, holding bells in her hands and wearing a crown on her head (figure 2.8).<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, paganism remains as there are several sea-hybrid *mirabilia*, two of which are musicians playing a type of flute and tambourine; and in the middle,

78 As opposed to the rest of the *mirabilia* that are depicted at Christopher's feet and depicted as the (non-Christian) Other (bent, crooked, and naked), the mermaid has been given a pious appearance: her hair is tied back, and as a Christian she is dressed, not naked as a pagan. Furthermore, her crown can be perceived as the crown of life, awarded to new-comers to the faith after baptism. Her bells thus suggest that she is ringing them to gather the other pagans in the river and lead them too to pass through Christopher's baptismal waters and convert to Christianity. See discussion by Berger, "Der große Heilige," 179–80, and Bebawi, "Crown of Life," 265, and for the possibility of considering her crown as a Marian attribute, Meier-Seethaler, "Christophorus und die Nixe." In addition to the "Christianized" mermaid, the artist showed a man on the river bank by Christopher's right foot kneeling and with his hands in prayer; he may be identified as Bishop Johann Nas (1534–1594), who was responsible for having the fresco restored. In front of him in the water there is a pair of scissors on a red background. Notably, while this device appears in the bishop's coat of arms, scissors were also used as devotional amulets; see Blick, "Bringing Pilgrimage Home, 190. I thank Robin O'Bryan for pointing out the significance of the scissors and alerting me to this reference.

between the saint's feet, there is a *mirabilium* with frog's legs and what seem to be thorns for hair. Though not all have yet passed through the saint's legs, it would seem that in Weidental Christopher's image was visually articulated to suggest just that. The Christopher images constitute perfect expressions of the reconciliation possible between folkloric pagan notions and Christian beliefs. Christopher thereby embodies the ultimate intermediary between paganism and the Christian God.

The sublime's aspect of the journey had received expression as early as the twelfth century along the Alpine roads as the Zillis example indicates (see again figure 2.5). As in the writings of both Augustine and of Richard of St. Victor, who discussed yearning and ecstasy as main emotions in experiencing God, the process of mental and spiritual elevation—the journey towards God—was the ultimate Christianization of the sublime experience. On the mountainous Alpine roads, the pilgrims literally set out on such a dangerous journey, motivated by the desire for spiritual reward and ascending ever higher. Along their journey, the sublime markers of the Alpine nature that formed the backdrop to the image of St. Christopher were thus “appropriated and molded” by the giant, who confronted the forces of nature, watched over the pilgrims' travels, and guided them onwards on their path to redemption. With Christ in his arms, as the giant's visual expression of being one with God, Christopher stands tall in the giants' ancestral wilderness as the ultimate expression of the sublime—the human yearning to ascend and expand both soul and mind, in the search for God and salvation.

In contrast to the small villages where the pilgrims rested along the Alpine roads, such as at Zillis, and where the “Bearer of Christ” manifested the goal of the quest as a notion of the sublime, in the fifteenth-century Merano image the marvelous was manifested as a legitimate and integral part of the sublime. As the capital of the Alps following the Roman conquest of the region, Merano manifested a new, reconstructed, and valid notion of the Christian sublime, via the depiction of Christopher with the pagan *mirabilium* (a mermaid).<sup>79</sup> Such depictions maintained the delicate balance that neither crushed nor overruled paganism. Rather, it benefited from adding the traditional implications and meanings of the pagan mermaid's sublimity to Christopher's sublime appearance. This delicate balance would seem to be upset in the Weidental image of Christopher (see again figure 2.6), as suggested by the apparent attempt to convert all the *mirabilia* in his “baptism river.”

79 Hödl, *Habsburg und Österreich*, 93–98.

As a Christian symbol in the culturally diverse capital of the Alps, Merano's Christopher at St. Nicholas Church thereby appropriated paganism (in both nature and its *mirabilia*) for the supreme God as the origin of all sublime expressions, including the Nordic and Greco-Roman notions and folkloric beliefs. In addition to expressing continuity from the pagan to the Christian era, Christopher's location high above the church entrance makes him hover atop the center of the Merano topographical basin. Surrounded by three mountain ridges, approaching 3,335 meters (10,942 feet) his image seems to be ascending to the landscape of his homeland, encompassing the surroundings to indicate Merano as the center of the Alps. Thus, while Zillis's Christopher had appropriated the sublime landscape and, through the obscuring of his pagan origin, had introduced the pagan sublime into God's hierarchy, in Merano the saint's pagan origin was exploited to stress a different notion. In Merano, the giant Christopher, standing with the mermaid at his feet, became the very means to convey the sublime. Similar to the giant, the sublime too was rooted in paganism; in order to endure in Christianity, it needed to be converted. Hence, as a converted giant with a mermaid companion, Christopher manifests an articulation of Merano's Christian sublime.

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### 3. Giants as Primordial Ancestors in Sixteenth-Century Art and Poetry

*Andrea Bubenik*

#### Abstract

Envisioned as primordial ancestors in art, and at the heart of origin stories in epic poetry, giants were ubiquitous in sixteenth-century Europe. Establishing ancestry with giants was pervasive in the German tradition via the epic *Nibelungenlied* and the archaeology of Maximilian I. Later, the printmaker Hendrik Goltzius would interpret the colossal figure of Hercules not only in terms of Dutch nationalism, but also of ancestral significance. In England, within the cultural archaeology of Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene* several giants are invoked in order to imagine past ancestry, as much as future hopes of imperialism. This paper takes a comparative approach and analyzes how giants figure prominently in German, English, and Dutch art and epic poetry.

**Keywords:** *Nibelungenlied*, Maximilian I, *Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser, Hendrik Goltzius, Hercules

Early modern art and poetry attest to a widespread and pervasive belief in the existence of giants, not simply as vanquished foes or the villains of myths and fairy tales, but as primordial ancestors. In Northern Europe an imperative to discover origins included the revival and creation of epic poems that featured giants in pivotal roles. Ancestral giants were also visualized in woodcuts and engravings, their physical remains sought and coveted, all toward consolidating “evidence” of their existence. While it may seem odd to locate giants at the heart of nascent national identities, this is precisely what multiple early modern artists and poets sought to do, often with the support of their patrons. These stories of giants were not necessarily obscure or fantastic, or seen in terms of the Other, but in

some crucial instances were central to monarchies, their courts, and the politics of place. A cultural history of giants must consider the role of art and poetry in supporting such beliefs and also take discovery accounts of gigantic bones and relics seriously.

This chapter will discuss giants who figure in German, English, and Dutch art and epic poetry as a way of accounting for origins. Contra other traditions where the giant is a malevolent force, it examines how giants were interpreted as vital to blood lines and even wielded as a means to assert the right to rule. In these northern geographical realms, all at a physical remove from Greek and Roman antiquity, imaginings for the distant past were especially important. There was a creative energy to how rulers characterized their ancestry, especially the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519) and Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) of England. At early modern courts, the inclusion of giants in dynastic narratives shows how amorphous and complex these figures were. Walter Stephens has argued that in some contexts there was a perceptible cultural shift in the sixteenth century, “to reverse and redefine the cultural valences of the Giant, to change him from the embodiment of evil and alterity into an ideal representation of national identity.”<sup>1</sup> This chapter considers further case studies as support for this claim, and characterizes how cultural archaeologies focused on giants were expressed via art and poetry, and then used toward political ends and even nation building. Cultural archaeologies simply entail the myriad of approaches to the physical and cultural remains of the distant past, which enabled a pluralism for giants in the early modern period. In other words, the giant could be what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has called “a foundational monster.”<sup>2</sup>

This is not to discount or contradict the stories of malevolent giants which also circulated and carried weight, especially biblical accounts which feature few, if any, “good” giants.<sup>3</sup> If anything, an inherent pluralism to giants can be perceived. The *Dissertatio de Gigantibus* (1741) by the French Benedictine monk Augustin Calmet (1672–1757) is a culmination of biblical commentary on giants, a compendium of giant lore and known sources, in which giants

1 Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 6.

2 The full quotation reads: “The giant is a foundational monster: from his body, the earth is fashioned and the world comes into being”; Cohen, *Of Giants*, xvii. See also Morgan, *Monster in the Garden*, 132.

3 As Stephens puts it dramatically, “There are no good giants in the theological mainstream,” apart from efforts to interpret Noah and his offspring as giants; “De Historia Gigantum,” 69. This is qualified by Stephens himself with the inclusion of St. Christopher as a “good Giant”; *Giants in Those Days*, 43; and see chapter 2 of this volume.

are presented as uniformly evil. Calmet sought to prove that the giants of biblical accounts had existed, and he thus took very seriously the question of what constituted their size—"it would exceed the normal five-and-a-half foot stature of our own contemporaries by several feet, even doubling, tripling, or quadrupling it."<sup>4</sup> An antithesis to the biblical approach is the literary tradition cemented by François Rabelais (1483/94–1553), who famously remade the giant into a figure of fun and satire in his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–64). But not all literary accounts of giants sit in these polarizing camps of the sacred and the satirical—other sources point elsewhere. The first major epic poem written in English, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590–96), features at least eight giants who are thrust into pivotal roles within this extended allegory of the reign and colonial enterprises of Queen Elizabeth I. Analogously, Emperor Maximilian I deployed the epic *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200) as support for his claims to ancient ancestry, and pursued the larger-than-life remains of the poem's hero Siegfried. Art and visual traditions also highlight how giants were deployed for coalescing identities, as will be detailed with the Dutch interpretation of a colossal Hercules as their national symbol, to consolidate their efforts in the war against Spain. Meanwhile, ancient bones of giants were displayed on the exteriors of buildings, and the graves of giants identified throughout the north.<sup>5</sup>

This pervasive interest in giants continued even in the face of the evolution of natural history, and the developing understanding in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that giants' bones might in fact belong to elephants or whales.<sup>6</sup> The stories of giants persisted and continued to render colossal relics comprehensible. Ultimately the discoveries and investigations of giant bones would become entwined with the study of fossil objects and theories of their formation.<sup>7</sup> Persistence of gigantic lore is aptly demonstrated by the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), a thinker whose name is not usually found in discussions of fantastical thinking. In 1692 Leibniz received a gigantic tooth in the mail, along with a letter asking for his thoughts on the discovery of an enormous human skeleton. Writing to his patron the Duchess Sophie, Leibniz stated: "I have just been sent from

4 Cited in Stephens, "De Historia Gigantum," 64; Calmet, *Dissertatio de Gigantibus*, 7:764.

5 Among the cities known to have prominently displayed giant bones (and included in this essay) are Worms and Antwerp.

6 Or as Debus has framed it: "belief in giants and a curious theory of gigantism were still soberly debated then, not unlike how the ancients viewed giant bones which unless anthropomorphized seemed otherwise incomprehensible"; *Prehistoric Monsters*, 24.

7 Ibid.



Brunswick a very large tooth from an extraordinary animal whose skeleton was found close to the aforementioned city. And I have been asked for my opinion on it. The common man forcefully claims that it is from a giant. It would in that case have to have been relatively about the size of a house.”<sup>8</sup> In another passage rife with sober deductive reasoning, Leibniz goes on to claim that it is likely that the tooth came from an elephant, and yet he is perplexed because of where the tooth was found: “as elephants hardly live in cold countries, one could doubt if this tooth would not be from relics of some large sea monsters, since seashells and other remains of sea animals are often found in the middle of the land that the ocean perhaps once covered ... but to better judge about all this, I replied that we should collect as much as possible all the pieces of the skeleton.”<sup>9</sup> Eventually this tooth was rightly characterized as the petrified tooth of a woolly mammoth, and would go on to be among the founding objects of the University of Göttingen’s Royal Academic Museum.<sup>10</sup> But Leibniz’s letter and musings remind us that rational minds grappled with issues of ancestry and origins, just as giants could be a catalyst for new scientific investigations. For Leibniz a way of discounting giants was to collect rocks and fossils as research for his book on the primordial earth that would be entitled *Protogaea* (published posthumously in 1749). At the same time it is important to note that an image of a skeleton of a unicorn was included in this otherwise serious account of geoscience.<sup>11</sup>

The case of Leibniz also shows us that it would be wrong to chart a course for giants as a simple march toward discounting their existence. Sources matter: the focus in this paper is resolutely on art and poetry as modes of contemporary and historical thinking. The philosopher and historian Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) argued not only for the existence of giants, but also for their role in a poetic metaphysics. Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* (The New Science) published in 1725 is one of the most ambitious attempts to account for a history of the world and emphasizes poetry, fantasy, and cultural memory as ways for understanding the world. Not only did Vico

8 July 5, 1692 to Duchess Sophie (Electress of Hannover, 1630–1714); Leibniz, *Sämtliche schriften und briefe*.

9 Ibid.

10 The tooth is housed in the Universities Coimbra Group; see the image at: <https://collections.ed.ac.uk/coimbra/record/97356>.

11 Ariew, “Leibniz on the Unicorn and Various Other Curiosities,” 267–88. This is similar to what Ulisse Aldrovandi did in his *Monstrum historia* (1642) which included satyrs, centaurs, and cyclops together with dwarfs and Patagonian giants, indicating the still widespread belief in mythical creatures. I thank Robin O’Byrne for this reference.

place an immense value on poetry as the primordial language of humankind, he was interested in the “metaphysics of the poet giants.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, giants are referenced throughout the text as primordial ancestors and part of the first age of humankind. As Vico states: “Giants, as we shall show by physical histories found in the Greek fables and by proofs both physical and moral drawn from civil histories, existed in nature among all the first gentile nations.”<sup>13</sup> Vico goes on to acknowledge physical remains as proof: “Of such giants there have been found and are still being found, for the most part in the mountains, great skulls and bones of an unnatural size.”<sup>14</sup> And finally he provides a working definition: “the aborigines were giants, and the term ‘giants’ properly signifies sons of Earth. Thus as the fables faithfully tell us, Earth was the mother of gods and giants.”<sup>15</sup>

To date, the importance of Vico for giant lore has not been properly recognized. He is crucial to the case studies to be discussed below, given his understanding that poetry was vital to any explanation of the origins and indeed the development of human society. As Erich Auerbach has pointed out with regard to a national poetic spirit, “Vico provided a model. He too was convinced that poetry was the primordial language of man; for him, the giants and the heroes of the first two ages of his historical system were poets by nature.”<sup>16</sup> The turn to poetry as history is thus firmly theorized by Vico who argues that the first form of metaphysics is in fact poetry, and that “poets were thus the first historians of their nations.”<sup>17</sup> As Paolo Euron has suggested, it is as if “Vico rebutted the Enlightenment before its affirmation.”<sup>18</sup> Let us now consider some of these pre-Enlightenment contexts in detail.

## Germany

In 1520 Albrecht Dürer described in his diary his viewing of the physical remains of a giant while traveling abroad: “I saw at Antwerp the bones of a giant. His leg above the knee is 5 ½ ft. long and beyond measure heavy and very thick, so with his shoulder blades—a single one is broader than a

12 Vico, *New Science*, II.1.502

13 Ibid., I.VIII 61, 37

14 Ibid., II.III 369, 113

15 Vico, *New Science*, II. I.531, 186.

16 Auerbach, *Time, History and Literature*, 47.

17 Vico, *New Science*, III.V, 10.

18 Euron, “Baroque: History and Poetry in Vico,” 55.

strong man's back—and his other limbs. The man was 18 ft. high, had ruled at Antwerp and done wondrous great feats, as is more fully written about him in an old book, which the Lords of the town possess.”<sup>19</sup> Many things are remarkable about this passage. Dürer, famously detail-oriented especially in his diary, notes the precise measurements of the bones, and includes a comparison with an ordinary, albeit “strong” human. Also significant is Dürer's characterization of this particular giant as having accomplished “wondrous great feats” and even as having acted as a ruler, as corroborated by the town chronicles. Clearly, there was a broad awareness and acceptance of this testimony in Antwerp, as further demonstrated by the pride with which the remains were displayed and shown to esteemed visitors (and as will be discussed in the final section of this essay).

Dürer was certainly not alone in his interest in giants. His patron the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (r. 1508–19) was equally fascinated, and had a special interest and personal investment in the medieval epic poetry that featured ancient giants. For Maximilian these poems were veritable histories with heroes who were larger than life, literally, their enemies equally gargantuan. But Maximilian would do more than simply engage with such texts—rather he sought to insert himself within them, and to firmly establish the existence of, and his own links to, these primordial ancestors. As Christopher Wood has shown in his pioneering research, Maximilian had a creative view of the distant past, and also developed a genealogy that connected him to the heroes of epic histories and poems. This wish to “insert” himself in history culminated with his idealized autobiography, the *Weisskunig* (The White King, written between 1505 and 1516) with his secretary Marx Treitsauerwein, in which the accomplishments and deeds of Maximilian (thinly disguised as the young White King) are recounted in a romanticized and decidedly chivalric manner.<sup>20</sup> Even more compelling is his wish to reinforce his own heroic narrative with material evidence, pursuing bones and relics as proof of the existence of ancestral forebearers.<sup>21</sup>

Maximilian was especially interested in the protagonist Siegfried from what we now call the *Nibelungenlied* (The Song of the Nibelungs), an anonymous epic poem based on oral traditions that was given textual form by the thirteenth century. It was the first heroic epic to be written in Middle High German. The reception history of the various manuscripts that comprised the poem is very complex: many were dispersed (to be rediscovered in the

19 Conway, *Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, 104.

20 See most recently Bossmeyer, *Visuelle Geschichte in den Zeichnungen*.

21 Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 178.

eighteenth century).<sup>22</sup> Part of the *Nibelungenlied* corpus was the *Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid* (Song of the Hero Siegfried) which entered early print culture in Nuremberg around 1500. Via this part of the poem, Maximilian would have been familiar with the character of Siegfried, a handsome and questing knight, famous for his chivalric deeds. The lines between historical reality and literary creation were continuously probed and remained unsettled, with much debate as to whether Siegfried had actually existed (analogous to debates on the “historical” Arthur, see below). Maximilian’s interest in Siegfried is an especially telling case study for the search for primordial origins and accounts of the discovery of “bigger than normal” bones.<sup>23</sup> Deeply engaged with obtaining and displaying material relics of medieval Germany, Maximilian’s cultural archaeology was an assertion of his own right to rule and self-aggrandizing propaganda. An esteemed pedigree and blood lines were deeply valued; even more so if corroborated by material evidence. As Wood has put it, “the giants and archaic heroes became the elemental building blocks of a transfigured poetic version of myths of origins.”<sup>24</sup> As such, the fashion and passion for acquisition and display of gigantic bones continued unabated at Maximilian’s court.

In all of this, Maximilian was continuing and contributing to the medieval German tradition, which included “staking a claim to shared roots in a race of primeval giants.”<sup>25</sup> Under the Holy Roman Empire, German identity was established and strengthened, especially through assertion of the historical existence of a single Germanic people with its own lands, language, and character. Tacitus’s *Germania* (98 AD) was important to this strengthened identity, an ancient text that focused on the lands and habits of the German people, and an early exercise in ethnography that experienced a wide reception in the early modern period. Tacitus had even declared Hercules to be almost a god to the ancient Germans: “Hercules too is said to have visited them, and they sing his praises before those of other heroes on their way into battle.”<sup>26</sup> While not a god or even exactly a giant, Hercules would come to be interpreted as colossal in stature, certainly among Maximilian and his contemporaries (and later in Dutch circles, as will be discussed in the third section of this chapter). A cult of Hercules developed in the German lands with an attentiveness to the possibilities of larger than life-size heroes.

22 Whobrey, *Nibelungenlied with the Klage*, vii–xxv.

23 Wood, “Maximilian I as Archeologist,” 1128–74.

24 Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 173.

25 Scales, “Trojans, Giants and Other Germans,” 297.

26 Tacitus, *Germania*, 36.

Giants mattered greatly to German identity building, as did the texts and material evidence that corroborated their existence. We could also recall Vico, who mentions the “gigantic stature of ancient Germans” as cited by Caesar and Tacitus, cementing his observation as follows: “of such giants there have been found and are still being found, for the most part in the mountains ... great skulls and bones of an unnatural size.”<sup>27</sup>

For Maximilian such primordial ancestry mattered to his assertion of a right to rule. The relics and bones played important roles in burgeoning cultures of display, including the imperial *Kunstkammern*, but more than this, they were a direct link to a past made known in epic poetry. This mattered as much as, or even more than, what Tacitus had offered. As Wood has pointed out, when Maximilian collected he did so “without observing any of the distinctions that modern historical thought draws between ancient and medieval, or between sacred and secular. He researched the Germanic past enshrined in epic poetry as well as the imperial Roman past.”<sup>28</sup> We must recall the very creative relationship that the Germans had to their own Middle Ages, with Maximilian equally interested in biblical figures and saints, the heroes of epic German poetry such as Siegfried, and also figures from Roman antiquity like Hercules. Again, Wood sums this up perfectly:

The Germans had a different relationship to the Middle Ages than that of the Italians. They took seriously the *translatio* of the Roman Empire to Germany in the year 800. Since the Empire had ever since been a German affair, the Middle Ages were thought of not as an obscure, barbaric caesura, but as the true extension of Roman antiquity. To the German vision of an unbroken bond between antiquity and modernity corresponds the fascination with imperial genealogy, which the Italians did not share. Since the Germans did not view the breakup of the old Roman Empire and the translation of the imperial crown across the Alps as catastrophes, there was no need for a “renaissance.”<sup>29</sup>

In short, Maximilian was like other German scholars of the day in that he did not distinguish between “antiquity” and a “middle age,” and he valued the sacred and secular in equal measure. Maximilian’s quest for Siegfried’s remains is a powerful and timely reminder that he and his court historians took giants very seriously. In the German lands, identity was not dependent

27 Vico, *New Science*, II.III.369.

28 Wood, “Maximilian I as Archeologist,” 1128.

29 Ibid., 1138.

only on sources from antiquity, but instead on home-grown and potent poetry. As Len Scales has noted, these were myths “which Germans were able to locate within imagined pasts even more illustrious, and certainly more authoritative, than those to be found in the forests of *Germania*.”<sup>30</sup> Any material evidence was seen as a direct link and much coveted.

Turning to the saga of the *Nibelungen*, and especially the *Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid* poem itself, it is easy to see how the power, justice, and brute strength of Siegfried would have greatly appealed to Maximilian. Siegfried is on a quest to rescue the Burgundian princess Kriemhild from a dragon. Along the way, with the help of a dwarf named Eugel, Siegfried fights and kills the giant Kuperan, acquires the Nibelungen treasure, also kills a dragon, and marries Kriemhild. By the sixteenth century, Siegfried was always likened to the giants he fought, as can be seen in the woodcuts designed to accompany the text—Siegfried’s size matching Kuperan in scale. In the textual accounts now summarized in the *Nibelungenlied* there is an early passage where Siegfried has recovered the treasure of the title and wishes to divide it up, only to encounter “twelve men who were giants ... but this did them little good when faced with Siegfried’s wrath, and he killed each one along with seven hundred of the land of Nibelungen’s best soldiers with that great sword called Balmung.”<sup>31</sup> This rapid action sequence concludes with the killing of two kings and the powerful dwarf Alberich. Rank, physical size, and strength in numbers—all are quashed by Siegfried, making Maximilian’s desired equivalency very understandable.

Although giants were often cast as villains and adversaries, they could also be allies and even rulers, as demonstrated by the Dürer passage with which this section began. The so-called *Ambraser Heldenbuch* (Ambras Book of Heroes, 1477), also written in the vernacular like the poems about Siegfried, contains twenty-five courtly and heroic narratives from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (including the *Nibelungenlied*). In the *Heldenbuch* the giants were always high in rank, and often counted as nobility and rulers—they could be emperors, kings, dukes, counts and lords, vassals and knights.<sup>32</sup> This notion of giants as rulers made its way into the commemorative art of the period, especially in colossal statuary. In his analysis of the dozens of colossal statues of Roland that appeared throughout northern Germany in the medieval period, Assaf Pinkus offers an apt characterization and summation of giants: “Their domesticated

30 Scales, “Trojans, Giants and Other Germans,” 305.

31 Whobrey, *Nibelungenlied*, 10.

32 Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 180; and Wood, “Maximilian I as Archeologist,” 1145.

powers, extraordinary proportions, hypermasculinity, and greatness of spirit came to be identified with Christian chivalric heroes, such as King Arthur, Charlemagne, Siegfried, and Roland, all of whom were described as men of great stature.<sup>33</sup> Colossal statues were a way of consolidating the belief in giants, literally, and also justified the pursuit of their remains.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the bones, all over Europe mythical and prehistoric giants were making appearances in various theatrical performances, carnivals, and imperial processions.<sup>35</sup> They could be performed by humans on stilts, or might be represented in woodcuts and engravings. Meanwhile the common belief that primordial giants were of the earth, became manifest visually in print culture. Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), the Jesuit polymath and scholar, and the Bohemian printmaker Wenceslaus Hollar (1607–1677) both had an interest in depicting anthropomorphic landscapes, images that can also be read in terms of giant lore, and certainly for an attention to colossal scale emerging from or imprinted on the landscape. In a Hollar adaptation of a Kircher print, the landscape is in fact a disguised giant head, with the sense of scale accentuated by the tiny human figures that are busy cultivating and fishing the surrounds (figure 3.1). The link between giants and the earth was explicit in Greek mythology, with the term *gigantes* usually taken to signify “earth-born” giants as the offspring of the earth goddess Gaia. Etchings such as Hollar’s cemented such views, richly suggestive that the remnants of giants could in fact be seen in the hills and valleys of the north. As we shall see in the final section of this essay, the Dutch would carry this view even further, interpreting megalithic structures of boulders in the northern Netherlands as *hunebedden*, or the graves of giants.

Such visualizations in print and indeed the landscape carried great weight. In Worms the mint was known to have images of *Nibelungenlied* heroes, including Siegfried, on its exterior, and colossal bones were also displayed, rumored to have belonged to a dragon, giant adversary, or even Siegfried himself.<sup>36</sup> In other words, beyond the many ancient sources and epic poetry, there was a full-blown popular interest that was richly visualized and consolidated in relics and the landscape, and as we have seen with Maximilian, in the ancestry of the monarchs themselves. We cannot

33 Pinkus, “Giant of Bremen,” 408.

34 Wood, “Maximilian I as Archeologist,” 1167.

35 There is a distinction to be drawn between the mythical/prehistoric giants of this essay and contemporary individuals with gigantism. For the presence of the latter at early modern courts, especially in England and the Netherlands, see Wells, “Court ‘Monsters,’” 197. Also see chapter 5 of this volume which discusses giants in the Tyrolean courts.

36 Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 179.



Figure 3.1 Wenceslaus Hollar, *Landscape*, seventeenth century. Etching, 14.6 × 20.2 cm. Gift of George W. Davison, Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University. Artwork in the public domain.

underestimate how bones and corpses, relics and visuals, were wielded and deployed to transform myth into fact. Or as Wood has stated, “It was very often not solid knowledge, but illusions and error that fired the imagination, overturned received ideas, and initiated critical thinking about the past.”<sup>37</sup> In a way, this makes both Leibniz’s reluctance to accept giants, and Vico’s enthusiasm to endorse them, easier to understand.

## England

The English approach to the past also involved invention and adaptation of sources to suit a newly formed sense of collective identity. Running parallel to Maximilian’s search for a historical Siegfried is the British preoccupation with the historical King Arthur as foundational ancestor. It has been shown elsewhere that the Tudor dynasty owed much of its very existence to how it exploited the legend of Arthur as a propaganda tool.<sup>38</sup> For the sixteenth century there are also analogies to be drawn between Germany and England

<sup>37</sup> Wood, “Maximilian I as Archeologist,” 1128.

<sup>38</sup> Schmidt, *Renaissance Hybrids*, 69.



in how epic poetry mattered to nascent ideas of nationalism in which giants played pivotal roles. But while the Germans had the *Nibelungenlied*, the English faced the absence of an analogous medieval epic in English, and contemporary poets would seek to set major works in a mythicized medieval past. Edmund Spenser (1552–1599) would fill the gap with his epic *The Faerie Queene* (1590–96), which can be read as an extended allegory for the genealogical and colonial aspirations of Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603). As the first epic poem in the English language, *The Faerie Queene* is especially relevant to a grounding in the “poetic metaphysics” as had been suggested by Vico.

Before turning to Spenser’s poem and especially its giants, it will do well to note that the English court and indeed the city of London were already imbued with giant lore at the time of his writing. By the sixteenth century, civic authorities regularly featured giants in royal entries, processions, and even coronations. The presence of the statues of the giants Gog and Magog on the Guildhall in this period is a well-known substantiation of this broad and pervasive interest in giants. The Guildhall functioned as a town hall in London for several centuries, a ceremonial and civic heart of the city. Cohen has argued that these giants lay “at the heart of national identity” for England, with the first versions likely installed during the reign of Henry V.<sup>39</sup> The statues have a complex reception history and are no longer extant: destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666 they were reconstructed in 1708, before ultimately being destroyed during the Blitzkrieg of World War II.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, we have some sense of what the statues may have looked like from an engraving of 1810 (figure 3.2). High in stature and flanking the townhall clock, Gog and Magog incline their heads downwards, and appear as benevolent protectors of the building they occupy, as opposed to menacing foes.

How did these two giants come to occupy such a prominent position in London? An excursus into foundational myths is necessary, looking back as far as William the Conqueror (r. 1066–87) and his annexation of England, adding it to his possessions in Normandy. This was a moment when the newly installed aristocracy had a crisis of identity, as it was put in the awkward position of not having a historical past with which it could consolidate the authority of its reign.<sup>41</sup> Part of the solution lay with Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. 1155) whose *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain) from 1136 provides a chronicle of the Trojan settlement of the land under

39 Cohen, *Of Giants*, xviii.

40 For the history of the statues, see Scherb, “Assimilating Giants,” 59–84.

41 Cohen, *Of Giants*, xviii.



Figure 3.2 James Asperne, *Gog and Magog: Guildhall Giants*, 1810. Etching and engraving, 10.5 × 16.8 cm. British Museum, London. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.

Brutus culminating in the reign of Arthur. In other words, the colonizing Anglo-Normans would locate an origin for their genealogy in the wandering heroes from Troy and the giants they encountered. Geoffrey's *Historia* was the narrative needed to legitimize the social stature of England's new nobility.

In his chronicle Geoffrey describes how the lands of the giant Albion and his descendants were colonized by invaders from Troy led by Brutus (himself a descendent of the Trojan hero Aeneas). The lands of Albion were then renamed Brutayne (Britain) after Brutus. During the colonization, Brutus killed all the indigenous giants, sparing only one especially fierce one named Gogmagog "in stature twelve cubits, and of such prodigious strength that at one shake he pulled up an oak as if it had been a hazel wand."<sup>42</sup> Brutus wished to pit Gogmagog against his own warrior Corineus, a battle to determine superior strength. After a brutal wrestling match, Corineus threw Gogmagog over the cliffs of Plymouth to his death on the rocks beneath (a narrative of killing giants that would find an exact echo in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, as will be discussed below).

Gogmagog would find new life in a dynamic tradition of nation-building for England. This giant's identity is complicated by the way Geoffrey in his

42 Geoffrey, *History of the Kings of Britain*, I.16.

chronicle drew upon a range of sources, especially biblical. Appearing in both Genesis and Revelation, Gogmagog passed into late classical and medieval literature from the biblical tradition. The name was altered and adapted: in some accounts the two were a single giant (Gogmagog), sometimes separated into two individuals (Gog and Magog), sometimes used to designate ethnic groups (the races of Gog and Magog), and sometimes lands. Endlessly changeable, Gog and Magog were names that were alternately used for Goths, Saracens, Scythians, and of course the gigantic sons of Albion. These giants were used to fulfill a variety of cultural needs, including group identity, the establishment of common histories, all of which would be deployed toward territorial expansion.<sup>43</sup> Primordial ancestry in this instance stems from biblical sources but is entirely adaptable for secular and civic purposes. Characterizations of Gogmagog, or Gog and Magog, were used and reused for centuries, and were as significant to English collective identity as Brutus and later Arthur. Giants became symbols of cultural capital and nationhood.

There is evidence of effigies of giants being present at ceremonials in the early fifteenth century, but the first definitive appearance of Gog and Magog is during the London entry of Philip II of Spain and Mary I of England in 1554 on the occasion of their marriage.<sup>44</sup> From then on giants were to become entwined in the civic identity of the city. Victor Scherb has carefully detailed how “Gogmagot the Albione” appeared in the pageant designs for Queen Elizabeth I, along with “Corineus the Briton,” a giant-killer who was portrayed as a giant, the two effectively incarnating Britain’s historical origins.<sup>45</sup> The giants became a genealogical source, holding within themselves a past but also a possible assured future under Elizabeth I. They were a source of collective identity, and especially significant at a moment when there was coalescence among the conquered Anglo-Saxons, the ruling Anglo-Normans, and some Celtic groups. As Cohen has put it, “this movement toward communal identity was brought about through the agency of the giant, a procession of heroes, and a cleric named Geoffrey who envisioned a singular history for all of them.”<sup>46</sup> First positioned as impediments to

43 As Scherb observes, “since their earliest appearances in written history, Gog and Magog—whatever their precise definition—have fulfilled a cultural need for a sense of group solidarity, itself a product of many factors including an association with a specific territory, a shared history, and a distinctive shared culture”; “Assimilating Giants,” 59.

44 Ibid., 71–72.

45 Ibid., 72. As pointed out by Stephens, *Giants in those Days*, 41, “not all gigantic effigies belonging to British towns originally represented Giants; and only with the passage of time did the gigantic size of some British effigies come to be taken as literally representative.”

46 Cohen, *Of Giants*, 31.

British colonization, Gog and Magog were then neutralized to serve and even bolster the monarchy. Far from being fringe characters, these giants were characterized as primordial ancestors, elements of a consolidated British heritage and even emblems of the city of London in all its glory. They were also made to serve the genealogy of Elizabeth, one that was so great it could encompass “both giants and giant-killers” and bring about growth, power, and endurance.<sup>47</sup>

Gogmagog would later make an appearance within the cultural archaeology of Edmund Spenser’s epic poem *The Faerie Queene*. Written in six books over six years, it is one of the longest poems in the English language, with 36,000 lines and over 4,000 stanzas—and yet famously it was unfinished. As an allegory of the reign of Elizabeth I, the poem can alternately be read as praise and criticism. As Spenser himself noted, *The Faerie Queene* is concerned with both fashioning a gentleman of noble person and accounting for the prehistory or history of the land that fostered such a figure.<sup>48</sup> Again, it is noteworthy that the English had no medieval epic poem comparable to the German *Nibelungenlied*—only in the sixteenth century with Spenser and *The Faerie Queene* did they finally have an epic poem written in the English language. More than this, Spenser would continue to address the search for primordial ancestors, just as Geoffrey of Monmouth had done in the twelfth century with his *Historia*. Poet and historian alike faced a dearth of English origin stories, a gap that Spenser sought to fill with his epic poem.<sup>49</sup>

Let us consider how Spenser frames giants as the first inhabitants of Britain, the wild giants of Albion already encountered above. After describing “the land, which warlike Britins now possess,” Spenser goes on to describe its original owners: “But far in land a saluage [savage] nation dwelt/ Of hideous Giaunts, and halfe beastly men.”<sup>50</sup> Even Gogmagog, here referred to as Goëmot, makes an appearance, and is beaten and slain by Corineus.<sup>51</sup> Spenser describes how the remains of this battle can be seen in the earth, “the western Hogh [half], besprinkled with the gore / Of mighty Goëmot.”<sup>52</sup> For

47 Scherb, “Assimilating Giants,” 73.

48 As Spenser states at the outset of the poem, in a prefatory letter to Walter Raleigh, “The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline”; Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, I.

49 According to Bouwsma, “Of the six thousand books in the Bodleian library at Oxford in 1605, only thirty-six were in English”; *Waning of the Renaissance*, 7.

50 Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II.X.7

51 Ibid., II.X.10.8–9.

52 Ibid., II.X.10.7–8.

Spenser, the interdependence between the giants and the earth of Albion is clear, with the land preserving the fallen Gogmagog (Goëmot), “the remains of this battle,” to the present day. A similar idea is suggested in the etching by Hollar (see again figure 3.1) where the landscape is formed by the giant’s head. In Spenser’s poem giants are present at the moment that civilization begins and they are portrayed definitively as the original inhabitants of Britain; he suggests that their remains can be seen in England’s landscape.

Spenser was very familiar with giant lore and made exceptional use of past textual source material that had already advocated a sense of English identity with giants envisioned as the original inhabitants of the land. The Albion giants in Spenser’s poem bear more than a passing similarity to those found in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century chronicle of British kings. Spenser also seems to have made use of *Holinshed’s Chronicles* (1577), a large collaborative work compiled by Raphael Holinshed that describes the histories of England, Scotland, and Ireland from their original inhabitants to the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup> According to the chronicles “Albion and his companie, are called giants, which signifieth none other than a tall kind of men ... and were not so called only of their monstrous greatnesse, as the common people thinke (although in deed they exceeded the vsuall stature of men now in these daies) but also for that they tooke their name of the soile where they were.”<sup>54</sup> Later the chronicler goes to lengths to “prove” the existence of giants: “here haue béene men of far greater stature than are now to be found, is sufficientlie prooued by the huge bones of those that haue beene found in our time.”<sup>55</sup> Another passage in the *Holinshed* is especially relevant for its discussion of the term “giant,” as much as for Spenser’s cultural archaeology:

For this word *Gigines*, or *Gegines*, from whence our word giant (as some take it) is deriued, is a Gréeke word, and signifieth, Borne or bred of or in the earth, for our fore-elders specially the Gentiles, being ignorant of the true beginning of mankind, were persuaded, that the first inhabitants of any countrie were bred out of the earth, and therefore when they could go no higher, *Terræ filius* what it signifieth. Reckoning the descents of

53 *Holinshed’s Chronicles* were commenced around 1548 by a London printer named Reyner Wolfe who wished to compile a universal history; after his death the project was continued by his assistant Raphael Holinshed with a focus on the British Isles. Published in 1577 in a two-volume folio edition, these chronicles were an important source for poets such as Shakespeare and Spenser. See Kewes, *Oxford Handbook of Holinshed’s Chronicles*.

54 Holinshed, *Historie Of England*, book 1, chapter 3.

55 Ibid.

their predecessours, they would name him *Terræ filius*, The sonne of the earth: and so the giants whom the poets faine to haue sought to make battell against heauen are called the sonnes of the earth: and the first inhabitants generally of euery *Aborigines*, *Indigenæ* cuntrye were of the Gréeke called *Gigines*, or *Gegines*, and of the Latines *Aborigines*, and *Indigenæ*, that is, People borne of the earth from the beginning, and comming from no other cuntrye, but bred within the same.<sup>56</sup>

This creative etymology argues for giants as indigenous with entitlement to the land, not only in England but as “the first inhabitants ... of every country.”

There is at least one major giant in every book of *The Faerie Queene*, whose actions range from combative to philosophical. Spenser's roster of giants gives nuance and complexity to what a giant was and could be: to the aforementioned Goëmot, he added the giants Orgoglio, Disdayne, Argante, Ollyphant, Lust, Cormourant, Grantorto, Geryoneo, Corflambo and finally, the titanic giantess Mutabilitie (who appears in the final book of the poem). As suggested by their names, many of these giants represent evil and formidable challenges to the knights of fairyland. For example, the twins Argante and Ollyphant are lustful and aggressive giants, whose sexual appetites are contrasted with the chaste knights they encounter. As the accomplice to her brother Ollyphant, whose name has phallic connotations, the giantess Argante is portrayed as especially lustful; she even kidnaps a Squire. Orgoglio, which means “pride” in Italian, attacks one of the poem's main characters, the Redcrosse knight who epitomizes the Christian Knight in book I of the poem. Orgoglio defeats the Redcrosse knight and throws him in his dungeon, only to then be killed by Prince Arthur himself. Arthur, who also slays a dragon earlier in the poem, haunts much of the action of *The Faerie Queene*, and Spenser is known to have drawn upon Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle for his version of Arthur.<sup>57</sup> Orgoglio is described as a “monstrous masse of earthly slime,” and “his stature did exceed, the hight of three the tallest sonnes of mortall seed.”<sup>58</sup> When Arthur kills Orgoglio, he thus kills the direct descendent of an original inhabitant. Read this way, Spenser provides a justification for the colonial enterprises of one of Britain's most important foundational figures who kills a giant ancestor.<sup>59</sup>

56 Ibid.

57 Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 2.9–10.

58 Ibid., I.VII.8.

59 Ibid., I.VII.9.

But Spenser complicates things. Nothing is straightforward in his fairy land, where easy binaries of good and evil do not apply. In book 5, Artegall, the knight of justice, comes across a crowd on a beach listening to a giant speak: "There they beheld a mighty Gyant stand / vpon a rocke, and holding forth on hie / An huge great pair of balance in his hand / With which he boasted in his surquedrie / That all the world he would weigh equallie / If ought he had the same to counterpoys."<sup>60</sup> The so-called "giant with scales" seeks to convince those gathered that the earth and sea are unfairly balanced, and by extension there is a lack of equality between the elements, and reigning inequalities among people. In the twenty stanze that follow, the Gyant and Artegall debate and discuss. The giant argues that all things can be reduced to what he supposes to have been their original equality: "to weigh the world anew / And all things to an equall to restore," that the gifts of the earth including elemental entities such as forests and mountains and also wealth should be redistributed. Artegall argues that society need not be just, that each thing is delegated a place by measurement and weighing in balances, and more than this "All change is perilous, and all chaunce vnsound."<sup>61</sup> For Artegall inequality is the natural state of things and this is how society must remain. God's system of distributing wealth is not to be altered; rights cannot be quantified and distributed. At the end of the canto, Artegall's squire Talus grabs the giant and throws him in the water: "He shouldered him from off the higher ground / And down the rock him throwing, in the sea him dround."<sup>62</sup>

This encounter speaks directly to the pervasive sense in Spenser's poem that, beyond being the original inhabitants, giants complicate matters. The slaying of the thoughtful "giant of the scales" still has the power to startle, especially given his sympathetic and idealistic claims. As Bart van Es points out, "The fact that giants were often seen as the first inhabitants of the land (as figurative or even literal autochthons) must have made stories of their eviction especially valuable to the colonist"—perhaps making a point regarding Spenser's violent and racist dealings with Ireland.<sup>63</sup> Spenser's poem, as much as it seeks to account for a past with primordial ancestors and foundational myths, also holds within it the future, an anticipatory claim of indigenous inhabitants protesting any right to rule or ownership. Poetry is used to consolidate dynastic and genealogical ambition and cultural archaeology, but also sends warning signs for the future.

60 Ibid., V.II.30. "Surquedrie" is from the old French *surcuiderie*, for pride or arrogance.

61 Ibid., V. II.34–35.

62 Ibid., V.II.49.

63 Van Es, *Spenser's Forms of History*, 131.

Gary Schmidt has made the compelling suggestion that throughout his poem, Spenser was plagued by the uneasy sense that the English themselves were the aliens, at least insofar as “English” meant “Anglo-Saxon.”<sup>64</sup> In the most imperialistic sections of the poem, giants are the adversaries and ancestors who must be defeated in order for the monarchy to be consolidated. Elsewhere, as in book 5 with the “giant of the scales,” there is a more reflective quality. Van Es suggests that on occasion “Spenser allows himself to question the values, ethics, and claims of empire,” and when it comes to the giants, he blurs the distinction between “‘mungrell’ and ‘pure’,” or as we have seen proposes a philosophical giant with eloquent arguments for egalitarianism.<sup>65</sup> From its painfully excessive dedicatory openings, the poem becomes increasingly complex as characters struggle with their quests, perhaps even indicative of an ambivalence regarding England’s status as colonial empire.<sup>66</sup> Encounters with earthbound giants as the first inhabitants “of euery countrie,” as resistant to colonial assimilation, echo the poem’s centrality as a founding myth of British culture, but also point far into the future. Apart from being primordial ancestors, giants in Spenser are connected to resistance and heterodoxy, and as Schmidt has argued, “the concerns of peoples ‘coming from no other countrie, but bred within the same’ makes it a natural counterforce to the ‘island imperialism’ of the English.”<sup>67</sup>

Spenser’s patriotism is sometimes overemphasized, and seeing his poem only as an allegory for the right to rule detracts from the surprising nuances to be found in its 36,000 lines. More than this, we must pay heed to how Spenser’s poetry enabled an exploratory and discursive mode in which boundaries between good and evil are blurred and even unrecognizable. As noted from the outset, there was a pluralism to giants in the early modern period. But there was also a pluralism to how poetry and histories were woven together into expressions of truth-telling. As Van Es has stated, “The intellectual climate of early modern England did not demand absolute consistency: under the interlocking pressures of faith and ideology an amalgamation of competing approaches could still be held in place. In any case the borders between the literary and historical were not the same as those of modern scholarship.”<sup>68</sup> Spenser’s poetry was as much a source for an understanding of Elizabeth’s primordial origins as the *Holinshed*

64 Schmidt, *Renaissance Hybrids*, 54.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., 55.

68 Van Es, “Spenser and History,” 549.



*Chronicle* was. This enabling of poetry as history is something that Vico had recognized (as discussed above).

There is no doubt that giants were an important feature of history-making in the Elizabethan age. As we have seen, chroniclers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century and Holinshed in the sixteenth endorsed the possibility, indeed, the reality of giants. In his chapter "Description of Britain," Holinshed aimed at deductive reasoning, and in his examination of "Whether it be likelie that any giants were, and whether they inhabited in this Ile or not," he provided a firm "yes" to both propositions.<sup>69</sup> The belief in the one-time existence of giants was adhered to, as confirmed and scaffolded by England's burgeoning chronicles and epic poetry like Spenser's, and continued unabated as late as the eighteenth century. As both history and metaphor, the giant was at the heart of Spenser's imperial vision, where "giants manage to be history and poetry at the same time."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, *The Faerie Queene* is full of characters whose quests involve an imperative to discover their origins.

## Northern Netherlands and Flanders

A history of interest in giants is richly evidenced in sixteenth-century northern Netherlands and Flanders, especially in visual culture, and culminates in the engravings of Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617). For his interpretation of a colossal Hercules (see figure 3.5 below), which can be seen as epitomizing how giants came to be viewed as primordial ancestors, Goltzius would have drawn on the rich Dutch and Flemish tradition of including giants in processions and entries. For example, 1549 was a year when many Dutch and Flemish towns staged plays, processions, and presentations, and erected triumphal arches in honor of the crown Prince Philip, son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V ("ruler of the Low Countries" who ruled as Duke of Burgundy and Lord of the Netherlands, 1506–55). When Charles decreed that his son would be the heir to the seventeen provinces of the Netherlands, the occasion was marked by Philip's state visit to the northern territories, and a "Joyous Entry" (*Blijde Inkomste*) was planned for every province and every major town. Giants figured prominently in such processions, and were also made a part of the annual pageant (*Ommegang*) that took place on the Sunday before Pentecost, as visualized in a 1685 engraving by Gaspard

69 Holinshed, *Historie Of England*, Book 1, 8.

70 Van Es, *Spenser's Forms of History*, 137.



Figure 3.3 Gaspard Bouttats, *The Yearly Ommegang Pageant in Antwerp*, 1685. Engraving. Wellcome Collection, London. Artwork in the public domain.

Bouttats (1640–1695) (figure 3.3), a pageant still celebrated annually on the Brussels Grand Place. Bouttats, who was known for his engravings of topographies and city views, here presents a rich cultural document of an important civic event. The image is teeming with revelers, who flank floats carrying chariots, fountains, boats, an elephant, and even a colossal fish that spouts water. On the far left on a platform drawn by a horse is a giant figure, more than likely the giant Druon Antigon, a primordial giant who was part of the founding myth of Antwerp.<sup>71</sup>

The figure of Druon Antigon would have been very familiar to citizens of Antwerp, as a twenty-four foot statue of him was already present in the city's Grote Markt, the center of civic and commercial life in the city. The legend of Druon Antigon held that he had occupied a spot on the river Scheldt where he demanded a toll from all boats and ferries that carried goods. Failing to pay meant the giant would cut off your right hand and throw it

71 Geurts has detailed how statues and dummies of giants were essential to visualizing everything from the lives of saints and biblical scenes, to the primordial and ancestral giants such as Druon Antigon; "Myth, History, And Image in the Low Countries," 53–85.



Figure 3.4 Anonymous, *Interior View of Steen Castle in Antwerp*, 1872. Etching, 16.8 × 21.9 cm. British Museum, London. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.

in the river. Salvation came from a Roman hero Sylvius Brabo, who killed Druon Antigone, and cast him in the river, thus marking the future location of the city of Antwerp. Druon Antigone was often presented as a figure from antiquity, holding a scepter or scimitar, wearing a toga and Roman military dress, decorated with the city's colors—a giant neutralized and brought into allegiance with the city that had sprung up from his remains. No longer posing a threat to the city's commercial activities, the giant was now used to consolidate a sense of identity and well-being that was present and local, yet also primordial and ancient in origin. The pervasive interest in Druon Antigone and indeed effigies of giants as part of parade paraphernalia is further demonstrated in a later nineteenth-century engraving, in which the anonymous artist shows a young boy in front of a giant head (presumably Druon Antigone) that would have been used for the annual event (figure 3.4). The giant's head is carefully displayed amid precious armory, stored safely and in a prominent position for use in future events. While it is perhaps premature to speak of nationalism, identity and identity building were certainly emergent in cities like Antwerp, especially among the nobility, and as we have seen in the previous case studies involving Maximilian I

and Elizabeth I, giants featured regularly in accounting for origins of rulers and their cities alike.

Material evidence played a role in the Netherlands as well. In the late sixteenth century, Jonkheer Sweder Schele van Weleveld (1569–1637) described the graves of giants found in the German and Dutch lands as *hunen greber*, later adapted to *hunebedden*—enormous piles of enormous stones that are some of the oldest monuments in the region. These were explained as the remnants and tombs of giant primordial ancestors.<sup>72</sup> Since the early twentieth century, it has been understood that these megalithic structures (weighing up to forty tons with more than fifty identified in modern-day Netherlands) were erected by the Funnel Beaker Culture 5,000 years ago, after the penultimate ice age. But for the early modern viewer, these colossal and unwieldy structures could only have been constructed by giants. In 1547 the classically trained humanist Antonius Schonhovius Batavus (1500–1557) composed a treatise in which he attempted to locate the Germanic tribes described by the ancient author Tacitus.<sup>73</sup> He argued that one particular *hunebed* found in the Drenthe region represented the Pillars of Hercules that Tacitus had described in *Germania*: “The pillars of Hercules can still be seen at Rolde in Drenthe, not far from Coevorden. They are greatly admired by visitors, because the stones, which form an enormous heap, are so large that no cart or ship could have conveyed them.”<sup>74</sup> As we have already seen, Maximilian I had also wielded Tacitus as a way to claim primordial origins. With Batavus we see the urge toward consolidation of ancient sources with material evidence in full effect. Tacitus had described Hercules as an ancient ancestor for the Germanic tribes, and with the *hunebedden* tangible and visible evidence was prominently exposed. While no ancient source describes Hercules as a giant—he is distinguished from the race of *gigantes* from the earth (and birthed by Gaia)—by the sixteenth century he had attained colossal status, larger than life, claimed as an ancestor via Tacitus, and linked to the enormous *hunebedden* in the Dutch imagination.

From processions and entries featuring giants to the material evidence of their presence in the form of *hunebedden*—these contextual dimensions contribute to our understanding of the dramatic engravings of Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617). For Goltzius it was the colossal figure of Hercules that became significant for ancestral arguments as much as for the consolidation

72 Bakker, “Research of Dutch Hunebeds before 1912,” 25–57.

73 Ibid., 36–37; and see the discussion of Tacitus above.

74 Ibid., 37.



Figure 3.5 Hendrik Goltzius, *The Great Hercules*, 1589. Engraving, 55.5 × 40.4 cm. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1946, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in the public domain.

of Dutch identity. The size of the engraving matches its subject: in what is possibly the largest single-plate engraved figure of the period (55 × 40 cm), Goltzius crafted an unforgettable Hercules (figure 3.5). For its physical dimensions, as well as those of its subject, the engraving has come to be known as “the Great Hercules,” and for some, the *Knollenman* (bulbous man).

The figure exudes lofty and excessive strength with its exaggerated and physically impossible musculature. Standing proud and erect, encompassing the whole of the picture plane, Hercules is flanked on either side and in the distance by diminutive representations of two of his own feats of strength, with the bottom inscription leaving no doubt as to who the players are. Here, the couplet enacts the same confirmation of the existence of giants as Spenser's verse (discussed above). On the right, Hercules wrestles Antaeus (the giant of Libya and son of Oceanus), but the artist has shown Hercules in the same scale, a giant battling a giant. On the left, as supported by the inscription, Hercules fights the two-horned Achelous—giant son of the Earth (Gaia)—who has transformed into a Bull, as they duel for hand of Deianera. It is worth pausing on the inscription in full: "Is there anyone who does not know of Hercules's courage on land and at sea, and the cruel stepmother who did him so much harm? He was exposed to many monsters, the Hydra and to you, Geryoneus with your three bodies, and to the firebreathing Cacus. Here he defeats Antaeus and you, two-horned Achelous; but the Naiads enrich the branch with abundant fruits."<sup>75</sup>

This passage richly reinforces the central and colossal message of the central figure of Hercules. As Beth Holman has astutely observed, Goltzius combines the giant sons of earth and ocean in one image, indicating victories over both land and sea, which would be important to the political ambitions of the Dutch. More than this, the horn which Hercules has ripped from the head of Antaeus has been transformed into a cornucopia, symbol of abundant fruits; Hercules holds this cornucopia in his right hand, and brandishes a massive club with his left. Both Walter Strauss and Holman have convincingly argued that the labors of Hercules became allegorical *topoi* for the deliverance of the Netherlands from Spanish oppression.<sup>76</sup> In the Goltzius print, Hercules has evolved from mythological character into the primordial hero and forerunner of the Dutch people.<sup>77</sup>

Holman further observes that in the Goltzius engraving "the body of Hercules has been transformed into a densely packed topography of bumps and hillocks."<sup>78</sup> The figure of Hercules is seen as a veritable metaphor for the nascent Dutch Republic itself, the abundance of muscles seamlessly

75 "Amphitryoniadae virtus terraque marique / Quem latet? et tanti saeva noverca mali? / Ille tot expositus mostris, Hydraeque, tricorpor / Geryon atque tibi, flammivomoque Caco. / Ille hic Antaeum, et superat te Acheloe bicornem; / Naiades at truncum fruge ferace beant"; Latin translation from Leeftlang & Luijten, *Hendrick Goltzius*, 106.

76 Strauss, *Hendrik Goltzius II*, 498; Holman, "Goltzius' Great Hercules," 400.

77 Holman, "Goltzius' Great Hercules," 403.

78 *Ibid.*, 400.





Figure 3.6 After Hendrik Goltzius, *The Age of Iron* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 1, 1589. Engraving, 17.5 × 24 cm. Gift of the Estate of Leo Steinberg, National Gallery of Art, Washington. Artwork in the public domain.

stretching taut skin analogous to the many provinces and towns coalescing during the time of Goltzius's creation. Hercules's strength becomes a metaphor for defense. To Holman's observations we could add that the landscape in which Hercules finds himself can certainly add to the present discussion of primordial ancestry. Apart from the horn of Antaeus, there is little in the way of fruitful abundance in the image. The land is barren and rocky, with scant vegetation poking through. The body of Hercules, with its "bumps and hillocks" is echoed in the landscape that surrounds him, the diminutive figures that flank him also seemingly emerging from the earth itself. There is no hint of a civilization, in environs or his attire, or rather lack of attire—this is primordial flesh fully on display. We are reminded again that giants are of the earth, and at the heart of origin stories. We are duly reminded of the presence of giants in the Northern landscape itself, the *hunebedden* that marked their time in the region. Hercules, engulfed by his own muscles and the hills that surround can be read as either emerging from or returning to the earth.

The anatomy of this Hercules would carry over into other images by Goltzius. In *The Age of Iron*, created the same year as *The Great Hercules*, another giant is shown towering at the center of an image. Surrounded by small mortals who toil, the giant is an allegory for deep time or pre-history (figure 3.6).

The elements of iron and civilization are apparent in the foreground only. Like the *Great Hercules* this giant plants his feet wide apart like a colossus, barely attired, with the scantiest indications of the emergent civilization. Resplendent with exaggerated musculature, a colossus of strength, this giant clearly harkens back to a distant past in which such figures were the most powerful presences on earth. The engravings of Goltzius would have fired the popular imagination, and help us to understand why historians continued to advocate for the possibility of giants. More than this, they showed an inherent pluralism to what giants were in the past, and could stand for in the future.

## Conclusion

The three case studies under scrutiny, the giants of English, German, and Dutch origins, exemplify how the existence of giants was advocated and upheld in the art and poetry of early modern Northern Europe. As primordial ancestors, giants took their position in visual and written narratives, the epics and accounts of ancient origins. Thrust into roles that were creative and dynamic in scope, their physical remains were also used to bolster such narratives. From monarchs and their courtly subjects, to citizens of developing urban centers, the widespread belief in the existence of giants was often politicized and seen as vital to emergent local and nationalistic identities. Art and poetry played central roles in articulating histories that were of critical importance to such nascent identities. Broadly, in these Northern European contexts, at a physical distance from the antiquity represented by Rome, creative imaginings of the distant past were especially important. The German and English courts of Maximilian I and Elizabeth I respectively, distinct in so many ways, deployed giants in analogous ways. Similarly, the Netherlandish focus on Druon Antigon and Hercules attests to the profound relevance and pervasive nature of belief in giants for nationalistic purposes. As such, these figures of towering stature were imbued with a pluralism that is represented in the geographies outlined here.



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## 4. *A Champion large of portratour:* Robert the Bruce as “Giant” in Anti-Tudor Propaganda

Giovanna Guidicini

### Abstract

The depiction of King Robert the Bruce that welcomed James IV's queen, Margaret Tudor, into Aberdeen in 1511, was described by poet William Dunbar as “supremely awe-inspiring, physically powerful, and [represented] with a massive physique.” An analysis of the role of giant performers in early modern European festivals and in British folklore and literature offers new insight into the Bruce's appearance and function specifically as a giant, whose confrontational, untamed physicality stood for Scotland's claim of antique individuality, cultural divergence, and military superiority over England. The giant's role as a native, bellicose defender was challenged by James IV's marital alliance with the Tudor dynasty, and the performative giants' narrative would be reframed within the bounds of the upcoming pan-British world.

**Keywords:** William Dunbar, Margaret Tudor, James IV, Scotland, England, triumphal entries

In May 1511, Margaret Tudor (1489–1541), queen of James IV of Scotland (1473–1513), was welcomed into the royal burgh of Aberdeen with a visually stunning triumphal entry. The commemorative poem *Blyth Aberdein* (Rejoice Aberdeen, 1511) by court poet William Dunbar (1460–1520) is the only detailed account of the entry and it mentions the oversized figure of a giant among the pageants and spectacles devised by the civic organizers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dunbar, “Blyth Aberdein,” 251–53. An overview of the event expanding upon Dunbar's poem can be found in Pittock, “Contrasting Cultures,” 348–50, and Davidson, *English Mystery Plays*,

In Dunbar's words, "And next the Bruce, who was always fearless in battle / [is called and] comes forward riding as a crowned King / supremely awe-inspiring, physically powerful, and [represented] with a massive physique / as a renowned, fearsome, almighty champion."<sup>2</sup> The large-bodied character was the warrior nobleman Robert the Bruce (1274–1329), who led the Scots to victory in the First War of Scottish Independence (1296–1328) against England before being crowned king in 1306. The Bruce thus came to represent Scottish proud national identity and the right to self-government, and the royal House of Stewart, of which James IV himself was part, descended directly from the Bruce.

Scholars of Scottish spectacle have acknowledged that the Bruce as he appeared in Aberdeen in 1511 was a giant, rationalizing his size as representative of his towering role in Scottish identity, as a larger-than-life national hero. However, few have discussed the Bruce's function specifically as *a giant*, where the established characteristics of giants as characters of lore overlapped with and enhanced the Bruce's own character, himself suspended between history and myth.<sup>3</sup> This chapter investigates the giant Aberdonian Bruce in the light of the literary and folkloric tradition of which giants were part, at the European, British, and Scottish level. It contextualizes the burgh's authorities' unusual choice to introduce a giant in Margaret's welcome, as he is the only known giant performer appearing in a civic ceremony in early modern Scotland. Comparisons with other giant figures appearing as civic performers in events elsewhere in Europe will allow for reflections on the Scottish giant's physicality, construction, and workings. This chapter also discusses the significance of this giant's presence in the relatively isolated, smaller northern burgh of Aberdeen rather than in the culturally prominent and geographically central royal capital Edinburgh, which is related to specifically Aberdonian conditions. The giant Bruce's appearance in 1511 demonstrably expresses a pivotal, transformative moment in the relationship between Scotland and England through the language of public performance, casting him as a complex,

89–90. The preparations for the entry are discussed by Kennedy, *Annals of Aberdeen* 2:63, and for Dunbar's involvement, see Simpson Ross, *William Dunbar*, 73–74.

2 Dunbar describes the giant Bruce as follows: "And syne the Bruce, that euir was bold in sto(u)r, / Thow gart as Roy cum rydand under croun, / Richt awfull, strang, and large of portratour, / As nobill, dreidfull, michtie campioun"; "Blyth Aberdein," 252.

3 The Bruce is presented as giant belonging to the tradition of civic folklore in Withington, *English Pageantry* 1:57, 79, 170, and 195. Boardman and Foran, "Introduction," 23–24, discuss the giant Bruce's size as representative of his cultural relevance, with Fisher examining Scotland's folkloric tradition of giants in "Crying of ane Playe," 32–33.

ambiguous figure. Following a tradition of British giants as nationalistic heroes of literature and folklore, the Bruce's superhuman size boosts his role as Scotland's forthright, hardened indigenous protector, but the metaphor of the brave giant—in the established literary tradition, an archaic, lone figure standing for a disappearing past—becomes inadequate to represent Scottish identity from the sixteenth century onwards, when the relationship with England turned from bellicose to collaborative.

### Aberdonian, Scottish, and European Giants: A Comparative Methodology

The Aberdonian authorities' demonstrable awareness and adroit use of the language of spectacle justifies a geographically and chronologically broad comparative approach.<sup>4</sup> The Aberdonian giant had points in common with others appearing in comparable European festivals, being based on a shared responsiveness to the giant's role in literature, historicized folklore, and politicized civic, lay, and religious spectacles.

In early modern Europe, giants appeared in ceremonies and festivals as both threatening and benign characters, with entertaining and instructive potential.<sup>5</sup> In Arthurian lore giants and wild men represented the forces of native Britain inhabiting the dwindling wilderness, pushed aside by the incessive march of anthropization.<sup>6</sup> These liminal figures were over-belligerent, disturbed, and misguided, but also innately honest, artless, and uncorrupted by civilization's enticements. Their violent behavior, excessive sexuality, and unbridled individualism represented the base instincts that self-denying Christian knights strived to overcome to defend society's order, but their self-seeking lifestyle also portrayed a tantalizing alternative to the constraints of courtly life.<sup>7</sup> This duality will be relevant to James IV's treatment of the "Otherness" the giant Bruce represented. A comparison with the celebration of giants as mythical, if controversial royal forebears will help clarify the role of the giant Bruce within the Stewarts' own genealogy.

4 This is demonstrated by the competent selection of elements necessary for a triumphal entry in Aberdeen's burgh records for 1580; see Stuart, *Council Register*, 2:37. An overview of the European connections of the Scottish triumphal entries can be found in Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries*, 232–40.

5 Examples of festive giants in London, Chester, Lille, and Antwerp are presented in Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 41–43.

6 This refers to the process of conversion of the natural environment by human intervention.

7 Giants are presented as knights' alter-egos in Sandidge, "Gawain, Giants, and Tennis," 482–89.

The giant's appearance in 1511 should also be considered in the context of an established tradition of comparable (if giant-less) Scottish ceremonies dealing with the expression of "Otherness"; Dunbar himself commented positively on the burgesses' willingness in 1511 to proceed "as the custome hes bein."<sup>8</sup> Those ceremonies staged in Edinburgh, of which the Aberdonians were aware (and about which they felt competitive), will be particularly relevant.<sup>9</sup> An analysis of giant-adjacent characters such as wild men, Highlanders, and martial leaders appearing in comparable Scottish and Aberdonian ceremonies helps to clarify the kind of political thinking and allegorical language that would have influenced the giant's appearance.

### The Corporeality of the Aberdonian Giant

Modern historians' speculations that the Bruce being paraded through Aberdeen in 1511 was a giant is based on Dunbar's description of it as "large of portratour."<sup>10</sup> In Old Scots, "portratour" referred to portrayals through painting, sculpture, or verbal representation, emphasizing the overlap between the Bruce's actual physical stature, and his perceived stature as a historical figure looming large in Scotland's narrative of self-determination.<sup>11</sup> The Bruce was consistently depicted as a "great" man: John Barbour's *Bruce* (ca. 1375)—a widespread, celebratory account of the Bruce's reign—exemplifies this lasting tradition of glorification, presenting the king as wise war-hero instrumental in building Scotland's sense of collective self.<sup>12</sup> Like other nation-building heroes between history and myth, the Bruce was described by later historians as a man of exceptionally tall stature.<sup>13</sup> In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a conscious intersection between heroic deeds and giant physiques, and a widespread captivation with larger-than-life ancestors was expressed at the German, French, and English courts by

8 Dunbar, "Blyth Aberdein," 251; the traditional outlook of festival organizers is discussed in Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, 89–90.

9 Edinburgh's role as peerless paragon is expressed in Aberdeen's Council entry for May 5, 1511, which related the convenors' agreement to "Welcome our lady Sovereign the queen as nobly as any other burgh of Scotland, with the exception of Edinburgh only" ("Ressaue oure Souerane lady the queyne als honorable as ony burgh of scotland except' edinburgh'allanerlie"); Stuart, *Council Register*, 1:81.

10 Dunbar, "Blyth Aberdein," 252.

11 "Portratur(e) n.," *Dictionary*.

12 The parallel is presented extensively in Boardman and Foran, "Introduction," 21–25.

13 "Portratour" could also mean an individual's actual build; *Dictionary*. On the excavations of the Bruce's remains, see Penman, "Robert Bruce's Bones," 46–47, and 71 n. 165.

investigations of the allegedly supersized remains of champions such as the legendary German hero Siegfried, Roland, and King Arthur respectively.<sup>14</sup> Giant ancestors appearing in the celebrations for the Habsburg and Tudor dynasties in the sixteenth century offered rulers historicized legitimacy and grandeur: similarly, by representing the Bruce as a giant, Aberdeen offered the Stewart monarchs access to a comparable towering ancestral figure.<sup>15</sup>

Dunbar's description of the giant takes an inordinate amount of space in the rhymed account—as a true giant would. Four lines are dedicated to the Bruce alone, describing him as a fearless, militant, awe-inspiring crowned champion with a massive physique—while the group of James's royal ancestors who promptly follow the Bruce, joyfully waving new green branches, share three lines among them and remain anonymous and undescribed.<sup>16</sup> In line with general characters of “giantness” in literature and folklore, Dunbar's choice of adjectives underlines the performer's martial, aggressive physicality; while neither the poem nor the records contain information on its materials, construction, or operation, an investigation of comparable giant performers allows for reasonable hypotheses.

The Scottish giant was probably built of lightweight, easy-to-assemble material, like the giant Gogmagog and the oversized Corineus made of wicker and paper board figuring in sixteenth-century parades in London, and inspired by characters of British literature and folklore.<sup>17</sup> A flimsy Bruce still could have been of significant proportions, as similarly constructed giants in the Low Countries reached between 20 and 30 feet in height.<sup>18</sup> Frequent repairs would have countered the Bruce's inevitable dilapidation due to age and usage, and arsenic might have been added to the adhesive to minimize gnawing by rats.<sup>19</sup> The extensive list of materials used to repair

14 On contemporary examples of the investigation of alleged giants' remains, see Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 177–84.

15 The validating role of the Habsburgs' and Tudors' giant forebears in ceremonial entries is discussed in Scherb, “Assimilating Giants,” 71–72.

16 “The (nobill Stewarts) syne, of great renoun, Thow gart upspring, with branches new and greine, Sa gloriouslie, quhill glaided all the toun” as described in Dunbar, “Blyth Aberdein,” 252. The version of the poem most commonly adopted adds “nobill Stewarts” in place of a *lacuna* in the poem, as noted by Kipling, *Enter the King*, 317 n. 53.

17 Festival giants in civic celebrations in London are presented in Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 49–51. The relevance of the characters of Brutus, Corineus, and Gogmagog is introduced in the next section.

18 On the size of Dutch festival giants, *ibid.*, 53.

19 On the damages suffered by the London giants, and corresponding countermeasures, see Hone, *Ancient Mysteries*, 262, and on the preventive use of arsenic in the Chester giants, see Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 53.



the Chester giants in 1661 gives hints as to the Bruce's putative physicality; these include "hoops of various magnitudes, and other productions of the cooper, deal boards, nails, pasteboard, scale board, paper of various sorts, with buckram, size cloth, and old sheets for their bodies, sleeves and shirts, which were to be coloured; also tinfoil, gold and silver leaf, and colours of different kinds, with glue and paste in abundance."<sup>20</sup> Light effects might have contributed to the Bruce's awe-inducing appearance: in 1540, a lit candle was placed in the head of a festival giant in Coventry at night-time to create a terrifying look, and the overlapping of responsibilities for a Coventry artisan in 1567—tasked with making a festival giant, but previously known for creating pyrotechnics for religious plays—suggests a flamboyant, crowd-stopping element for giants like the Bruce.<sup>21</sup>

Judging from the information available on better-documented giants in early modern festivities, the Bruce's movement was probably achieved through ingenious handling of his limbs and body by concealed performers. Such performers could be on stilts, like the ones maneuvering armored giants during sixteenth-century celebrations in London: they moved realistically, but were disappointing at close inspection.<sup>22</sup> Or the Bruce could have been carried by performers who also maneuvered his limbs covertly from within: this was the case for the giants appearing in religious processions in early modern Padua.<sup>23</sup> Given Dunbar's description of the giant Bruce as "riding," some form of horse-powered structure is also possible, such as the chariots drawn by horses in which giant automatons sat and performed during a London pageant in 1672.<sup>24</sup>

While the Bruce might have been a simple painted image mounted on a horse, the theory of three-dimensional performative apparatuses is supported by three festive traditions of parading giant-adjacent martial leaders in Aberdeen, which relied on performer-based physicality enhanced by costumes and props, and on active involvement with the public. Firstly, from 1440 onwards, a dressed-up performer paraded in lively processions as the Abbot of Bon Accord during the Christmas period, jocosely commanding

20 Sharp, *Dissertation*, 203–4; and Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 52–53.

21 The Coventry giants' materials and construction are discussed in Fairholt, "Lord Mayors' Pageants," xx–xxii; Sharp, *Dissertation*, 204–5 refers to the use of candles. The relationship between giant-making and pyrotechnics in Coventry is explored in Davidson, *Festivals and Plays*, 43.

22 For more detail on the maneuvering of the London giants, see Hone, *Ancient Mysteries*, 168.

23 For other examples of giants maneuvered from within, see Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 53–54.

24 On the use of automatons on horse-drawn carriages, see Fairholt, "Lord Mayors' Pageants," 76.

the subversion of social rules as his nickname of the Lord of Misrule suggested.<sup>25</sup> The public entertainments associated with his appearance have many points in common with the tradition of royal civic welcomes of which the giant appearing in 1511 was part, supporting the Bruce's connection with Aberdeen's folkloric tradition.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, from the beginning of the sixteenth century, a performer impersonating the belligerently protective character of Robin Hood led uninhibited processions of armed youngsters as "a symbol of the burghs' collective martial might" and a catalyst for Aberdeen's civic identity.<sup>27</sup> The burgh through which the equally aggressive, martial giant passed in May 1511 was adorned with the kind of festive greenery typical of Robin Hood's Maying celebrations—emphasizing overlaps between these two overbearing champions. The Abbot, Robin Hood, and the Aberdonian giant expressed a Scottish folkloric tradition of appreciating bravado, coarse dark humor, the witty, the grotesque, and the supernatural—where giants appeared as didactic, comic, and historicizing characters.<sup>28</sup> Thirdly, the commanding, richly-dressed character of the Emperor (probably meant to represent Caesar Augustus) who appeared in Aberdonian Nativity cycles in 1442 and 1505 has been clearly identified as noteworthy forerunner of the Bruce—both expressing the burgh's interest in the instructive potential of powerful leaders' moralizing tales.<sup>29</sup> The giant Bruce's appearance in Aberdeen in 1511, then, was the offshoot of a tradition of collective, sympathetic, festive exploration of authoritative—if sometimes unconventional—leadership, and benefited from the burgh's practical experiences of processional ceremonies centered on costumed impersonations.

Finally, early modern portraits of the Bruce as an average-bodied man, to be augmented appropriately, can provide information on the giant's likely appearance in the Aberdeen entry. For the entry of King James VI's

25 The Abbot of Bon Accord (and his companion, the Prior of Bon Accord) are discussed as popular characters of Aberdonian folklore in Kennedy, *Annals of Aberdeen*, 1:90–92, 94, and in Robertson, *Book of Bon-Accord*, 1:234–35. For their significance in a wider cultural context, see Fisher, "Crying of ane Playe," 24.

26 This is argued in Pittock, "Contrasting Cultures," 350–51.

27 Robin Hood is discussed as a local champion in Fisher, "Crying of ane Playe," 24. The relationship between Robin Hood and the Abbot of Bon Accord is in *ibid.*, 25–27, and Kennedy, *Annals of Aberdeen*, 1:93. The latter text is discussed in Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, 137–38.

28 As discussed in Fisher, "Crying of ane Playe," 31–33.

29 The appearance of the Emperor in Aberdonian Nativity plays is explored in Kennedy, *Annals of Aberdeen*, 1:95. For parallels between the Emperor and the Bruce, and between Aberdeen's Nativity plays and the 1511 celebration, see Robertson, *Book of Bon-Accord*, 1: 235, 237–38; Bain, *Merchant and Craft Guilds*, 55; and Davidson, "English Mystery Plays," 89.



Figure 4.1 George Jamesone, *Robert the Bruce*, 1633. Oil on canvas, 68 × 68.5 cm. Fleming Collection, London. Photo: © The Fleming-Wyfold Art Foundation.

queen Anna of Denmark (1589–1619) in 1590 in Edinburgh, the Bruce—like in Aberdeen, the only royal ancestor to be identified and honored by an individual mention—wore a crown and held a scepter, the crown also being one of the props associated with the Aberdonian giant, emphasizing royal status.<sup>30</sup> A portrait of the Bruce displayed in the civic reception welcoming King Charles I (1600–1649) into Edinburgh in 1633 had a militaristic slant that was also probably present in the intimidating Aberdonian giant.<sup>31</sup> Depicted with an unkempt beard and unruly hair under a helmet, an authoritative, focused stare, and a rugged complexion, the Bruce appears as a seasoned man of action, his armor covered by an *all'antica* crimson mantle connecting him with the heroes of antiquity (figure 4.1). A later full-length portrait of the Bruce as a valiant general (1684–86) also shows him bearded and with long wavy hair, wearing a chainmail armor suit under a draped mantle, and an unusual crown-helmet combination possibly hinting at his double role as military leader and anointed king; he holds a

30 The appearance of the Bruce during the celebrations in 1590 is reported in Graves, “The Danish Account,” 115. James VI (1566–1625) was James IV and Margaret Tudor’s great-grandson.

31 This was one of 109 paintings by Aberdonian artist George Jamesone; see Thomson, *George Jamesone*, 64–68, 99–100. The presence of the portraits during the event is recorded in Drummond, “Entertainment,” 267.



Figure 4.2 Jacob Jacobsz de Wet, *Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland (1274–1329)*, 1684–86. Oil on canvas, 214.0 × 137.0 cm. Great Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh. Photo © The Royal Collection Trust.

round shield and a staff, and has a sword hanging from his belt (figure 4.2).<sup>32</sup> He is caught mid-stride, gesturing towards the background battle scene where a victorious rider in armor—from the similarities in attire, possibly meant to represent the Bruce himself—brandishes a weapon to disperse fleeing enemies. The giant in the Aberdonian entry could be imagined as an aggrandized version of these later portraits, carrying weapons and in full armor, the dynamic, focused demeanor of the man of action ennobled by a floating red cape, the unkempt hair and beard under a royal and martial crown-helmet combination.

The Bruce's frequent appearances after 1511 as noteworthy ancestor testify to his relevance to the history of the Scottish Crown, but also underline the intriguing uniqueness of his portrayal as a giant in Aberdeen. An

32 This was one of 111 portraits commissioned by the Crown from the painter Jacob Jacobsz de Wet II; on de Wet, see Lloyd Williams et al., *Dutch Art*, 153.

investigation of his appearance as a giant provides essential context for the pivotal shifts in political and cultural outlooks taking place during James IV's reign.

### The When and Where of a Scottish Giant: 1511 in Aberdeen

The period 1502–13 brought frequent changes to the complex Anglo-Scottish relations. The Treaty of Perpetual Peace (1502) and James IV's wedding to Margaret Tudor in 1503 promised peaceful, neighborly relations after decades of uncertainty. Margaret was celebrated in courtly literature as the new graft bringing forth future (re)generations, but by the time she entered Aberdeen in 1511 the couple had no surviving offspring, and critics were suspicious of her pro-English political mingling.<sup>33</sup> The rekindling of the French-Scottish alliance from 1508, and Margaret's brother Henry VIII's aggressive attitude from 1509, meant increasing hostilities turned into open conflict, leading to James's death on the Flodden battlefield in 1513.<sup>34</sup>

As a politicized celebration of international renown, Aberdeen's welcome to Margaret represented a key moment to reflect upon and respond to this unsettled atmosphere. The giant is one component of an extremely ambivalent event. On the one hand the green branches held by the royal ancestors following the Bruce celebrated the dynastic renewal Margaret heralded.<sup>35</sup> On the other, the pageants showing the Annunciation, the Homage of the Three Kings, and the Expulsion from Paradise recommended—under a pious celebratory veneer—passive motherhood, the subservience of foreign powers, and the punishment of deceitful, enterprising Eve [Margaret] respectively.<sup>36</sup> The giant is part of a similar, intentionally ambiguous narrative: while the appearance of supportive ancestors celebrated Margaret's new participation in the Stewarts' antique lineage, singling out the anti-English Bruce as

33 Bawcutt offers a political interpretation of Dunbar's poetry in *Dunbar the Makar*, 87–88.

34 In the Battle of Flodden or Flodden Field, fought on September 9, 1513 during the War of the League of Cambrai, King Henry VIII of England's army inflicted a severe loss upon James IV's Scottish forces. Dunlap treats the historical context of Anglo-Scottish relations in the early 1500s up to 1513 in "Politics of Peace-keeping."

35 For an investigation of botanical themes in contemporary Scottish art and literature as expressions of the dynastic renovation brought by Margaret, see Honeyman, "Rois Red and Quhit," 184–86; on the celebratory potential of (genealogical) trees, see Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, 90.

36 The symbolism and meaning of Margaret's entry is discussed in depth in Kipling, *Enter the King*, 316–18.

a gigantic, threatening figure demonstrated the battle-ready country's mistrust of their Tudor queen.

Aberdeen's special bond with the Bruce—possibly just an historicized folkloric construct, but nevertheless a powerful and lasting one—justifies his appearance as national champion in this burgh particularly. Aberdeen had been actively involved in the Bruce's military campaigns in the early 1300s, had suffered the English army's destructive retaliation, and had been rewarded by the victorious Bruce with royal protection, an armorial, and a pivotal charter (1319) bringing the burgh new wealth and influence.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the burgh in whose spaces the giant festive Bruce appeared was adept at expressing its position regarding the Anglo-Scottish situation through the language of artistic decoration and architectural renovation. For example, the treatment of the English and Margaret's own insignia in the heraldic programs of the King's College Chapel (ca. 1503) and of St. Machar Cathedral (completed 1521) efficaciously expressed how joyous confidence in their new queen turned to disappointed chagrin.<sup>38</sup> Following the vengeful devastation of (now, Old) Aberdeen by the English army during the Wars of Independence, a New Aberdeen had been established as a port immediately to the south—the very locations the queen would have passed through during her royal entry and her stay.<sup>39</sup> Hence, the civic spaces in which the giant Bruce encountered Margaret had been shaped by her ancestors' destructive warfare and the burgh's anti-English resilience, and was still transformed by the uncertain responses to her own ascension, reinforcing his thought-provoking presence as anti-English hero.

The Bruce's appearance in Aberdeen in 1511 responded to specific local and time-critical concerns, and this investigation shows how his role specifically as a *giant* countered an established English narrative of Scottish subjugation based on British historicized folklore.

37 The circumstances related to Aberdeen's close relationship with the Bruce is presented in Robertson, *Book of Bon-Accord*, 1:30–36. For the commented transcription of the so-called Stocket Charter specifying the highly advantageous political and economic privileges granted by the Bruce to Aberdeen, see Aberdeen City Council, “1319 Bruce Charter.”

38 Their flattering central positioning and detailed rendition in the chapel celebrated Scotland's new ally's spurious claims to the French throne and to antique lineage, as discussed in Milne, *Aberdeen*, 211. This can be compared with the marginal placement and pointed simplification of the English insignia displayed in the cathedral, where any reference to Margaret's role as queen dowager and on-and-off regent was also glossed over; see Shire, “King in his House,” 63–72.

39 Old Aberdeen was burned down by Edward III's army in July 1336. On Edward III's campaign of destruction in Aberdeenshire, see MacInnes, “Edward III,” 20–21. On New Aberdeen's subsequent development, see Bain, *Merchant and Craft Guilds*, 37–38.

## An Anti-English Giant *Redivivus* and a Civic Hero

In the history of Anglo-Scottish relations from the fourteenth century onwards, historicized folklore had provided essential backing for political and military decision-making. To clarify his own position regarding the Bruce's claim to Scottish succession, King Edward I (1239–1307) had requested a historical inquiry in archives and chronicles in 1290–1300, and John Barbour's *Bruce* (1375–76) was purposefully written as a political tool to justify the country's military response to English interference.<sup>40</sup> In this context, Aberdeen's presentation of a vigorous battle-ready giant represented an emphatic denial of English claims of supremacy based on key literary sources such as the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *De Origine Gigantum*, which declared native British giants defeated.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain, 1136) narrates the bloody victory of conqueror Brutus, giant-slayer Corineus, and their Trojan companions over native British giant Gogmagog and his oversized cronies, marking Brutus's subjugation of the island.<sup>41</sup> The Latin text *De Origine Gigantum* (Of the Origin of Giants, 1330s), adds detail to Monmouth's literary endeavor, exploring the giants' demonic origins and nature.<sup>42</sup> These disturbed characters lived a disordered life in the wilderness of what was then called Albion, until Brutus's victory over them brought structure, progress, and a new social order to the alien land he renamed Britain after himself.<sup>43</sup>

The necessity in the 1330s to revive and substantiate Monmouth's tale with the *De Origine Gigantum* has been seen in the context of the English kings'

40 Edward I had been asked by the Scottish magnates to arbitrate between conflicting claims to the vacant Scottish throne in the 1290s. On Edward I's historiographical investigation, see Carley and Crick, "Constructing Albion's Past," 56. On Barbour's *Bruce* as political tool, see Boardman, "Thar nobill eldrys gret bounte," 191–97.

41 Corineus's frequent representation as a giant in art, literature, and festive decorations as Gogmagog's supersized companion used physical size to express the Trojan warrior's valor as giant-slayer, and responded to practical visual requirements for symmetry when Corineus and Gogmagog were represented as a pair. On Corineus's valorous defeat of Gogmagog, see Scherb, "Assimilating Giants," 55–56, who discusses his pairing with Gogmagog in festive iconography in 72–75.

42 *De Origine* is the better-known adaptation of the Anglo-Norman poem *Des Grantz Geanz*; on both texts see Carley and Crick, "Constructing Albion's Past," 41–54. As discussed by Scherb, "Assimilating Giants," 59–60, in Gogmagog English culture conflated the biblical giants Gog and Magog, who threatened the Israelites and who represented the destructive potential of those living beyond acknowledged geographical or behavioral boundaries.

43 On the slaying of giants as metaphor for Brutus's new order conquering barbarity, see Cohen, *Of Giants*, 49–51, and Scherb, "Assimilating Giants," 65–66.

attempts to subjugate Scotland during the Wars of Scottish Independence, and in response to Scotland's claims of autonomy supported by military, political, and literary initiatives. The politicized use by the English kings of the narrative of the giants' origins and defeat is demonstrated by the position of *De Origine Gigantum* in the Great Cartulary of Glastonbury (ca. 1340) of which it is part, as juxtaposed to legal material related to England's claims of sovereignty over Scotland.<sup>44</sup> The timing is uncanny: in 1314 the Bruce's forces utterly crushed the English at the battle of Bannockburn, and in 1320 the Scots' famous Declaration of Arbroath successfully appealed to Pope John XXII, denouncing England's unjustified pretensions of supremacy. Scotland's historiographers rejected Monmouth's tale of Brutus's slaying of the giants as proof of historicized occupation, and of the English kings' supremacy as Brutus's heirs: instead they proposed a separate tale of foundation based on Egyptian and Greek forebears, devised—as stated in the Declaration—“from the chronicles and books of the ancients.”<sup>45</sup> The foundation tale of the defeat of giants from the *De Origine* became an English literary leitmotiv resumed during moments of crisis, to provide literary backing to a recurring nationalistic, anti-Scottish argument: it appeared for example in *Chronicle* (1457) by English writer John Harding, whose lifework centered on demonstrating Scotland's subservience to England.<sup>46</sup> It makes sense then, that in 1511, with Scotland's overbearing English neighbors threatening war once again, Aberdeen evoked a giant *redivivus* alive and well to welcome their Tudor queen: Brutus had evidently *not* killed all giants to claim supremacy over the whole of Britain, demonstrating Monmouth's tale to be misleading and English pretensions unfounded. And this battle-ready giant towering in the burgh's public spaces both scarred and rejuvenated by the Anglo-Scottish wars was not just *any* giant, but the same Bruce whose leadership in the early 1300s had curtailed English pretensions of supremacy over the whole of Britain!

44 The cartulary is a collection of manuscripts (letters, texts, documents, genealogical investigations) organized in sections, collected and/or redacted at Glastonbury Abbey and archive, ca. 1340. On the Anti-Scottish significance of *De Origine Gigantum* and the Cartulary, see Carley, “John of Glastonbury,” 59; Carley and Crick, “Constructing Albion's Past,” 54–59, 61–66. See also Scherb, “Assimilating Giants,” 67–68.

45 Transcribed in National Records of Scotland, “Declaration of Arbroath.” The politicized use of the giants' literary tradition is discussed in Carley and Crick, “Constructing Albion's Past,” 56–59; on the English use of the myth of Brutus for their own political purposes, see Drukker, “Thirty-Three Murderous Sisters,” 459, 462–63.

46 The resurfacing of giants in Harding's *Chronicle* is discussed in Cohen, *Of Giants*, 194. English claims of Scotland's subservience were again prominent after King James I of Scotland's capture by the English in 1406, his lengthy captivity, and conditional release in 1424.



In its dual presentation as foundational anti-English character of lore *and* illustrious—if belligerent—real-life ancestor, the giant Bruce can be interpreted as both a supportive and problematic figure for the Scottish king and his English spouse. Such complex roles are not unusual, both in giant-centered tradition and in the language of civic celebration—the latter emphatically relying on making different interpretations available to different audiences. As primeval, foundational local forces bound to the landscape, giants were often portrayed in literature and folklore as potentially disorderly but essentially cooperative, and as defenders of local communities' interests against an alien authority. In a Welsh version of Monmouth's narration, a revived Gogmagog moved to Wales to defend the country from the invading Britons, and more generally, early modern tales of oversized natives populating remote European corners and the New World embodied colonizers' experiences of robust local resistance to foreign threats.<sup>47</sup> This translated into ceremonial language: in Antwerp, a statue of local bloodthirsty giant Antigon, rather than of Antigon's more conventionally likable killer, the valiant soldier Braban, was paraded during religious processions, revealing the city's willingness to be associated with their questionable—but home-grown—giant forebear.<sup>48</sup>

The defense of a chosen town's political body as overlapping with the giant's own, and giants' traditional role as disruptors of court-centered feudal order, rendered their presence during triumphal entries a vehicle to express—under a veneer of folkloric celebration—civic concerns about a problematic ruler, as is the case in Aberdeen.<sup>49</sup> A straightforward reading of the inscription accompanying Gogmagog during the welcoming of Henry VI (1421–1471) in London in 1432 presented the giant as the king's bodyguard and protector. However, Gogmagog's uncommon size also diminished that of the young king by comparison, and the very presence of an armed defender hinted at existing anti-royal animosities. In fact, the giant has been interpreted as London's own champion, representing the interests of a powerful mercantile class able to exercise influence over the Crown.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, by representing the Bruce as a specifically local patron, an anti-English military

47 These protective roles are presented in Scherb, "Assimilating Giants," 71, and Weinstock, *Encyclopedia*, 282–84, respectively.

48 On Antigon's close relationship with Antwerp and as participant to civic processions, see Fairholt, "Lord Mayors' Pageants," xxiii–xxvi.

49 Giants are discussed as potential disruptors of the status quo in Sandidge, "Gawain, Giants, and Tennis," 483–85.

50 Regarding Gogmagog's role in Henry's entry, see Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs*, 50, who presents the giant as the king's champion, while Rodriguez, "'With the grace of God,'" 203–4 interprets the

leader, and a legitimizing royal ancestor—that is, as a symbolic figure cast into multiple roles, both intimidating and welcoming—Aberdeen's authorities did much more than construct a bland figure of carnivalesque entertainment. Rather, the giant's presence demonstrated Aberdeen's ability as a political body to evoke, control, and possibly unleash a foundational "cultural Other," claiming a dignified, even admonishing role as the entering monarch's political counterpart.<sup>51</sup>

A parallel between the case studies of London and Aberdeen regarding the presentation of giants as both celebratory and challenging reveals the difficulty of analyzing the Aberdonian giant given that we have only one source, and a courtly poem at that. Considering the 1432 event, if the poetic description by Henry VI's court poet John Lydgate is compared with the more unadorned account by John Carpenter, the town clerk of London, it is evident that some challenging aspects of Gogmagog's role were diplomatically minimized by Lydgate, whose patrons were both courtiers and London's wealthy merchants and guildsmen.<sup>52</sup> Dunbar's position as a valued courtier, poet, and entertainer throughout James IV's reign, and one who (poetically) sided with a concerned court in criticizing burghal administration, probably also colored his viewpoint of the 1511 event.<sup>53</sup> *Blyth Aberdane* was devised not as an objective record, but was probably intended to be publicly recited at court, addressing the monarchs' roles as civic patrons: it is likely Dunbar would have underplayed some of the Bruce's more challenging features to please his audience and promote good relations.<sup>54</sup>

Dunbar's choice of words to describe the giant's performance in Aberdeen does reframe the latter's participation from intimidatingly admonishing to willingly cooperative—in line with an identified trend in Scottish triumphal

giant as a challenge to the king's authority. This can be compared with Fairholt, "Lord Mayors' Pageants," xxiii, who presents Gogmagog as the champion of a prosperous, assertive London.

<sup>51</sup> The relationship between giants and civic politics is introduced in Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Lydgate's narrative is based on Carpenter's account, but Lydgate's translation of Carpenter's Latin prose into ornate English poetry creates a giant more sympathetic to the royal guest than Carpenter's text implied, also through an edifying comparison with Christian giant St. Christopher. On the comparison of Lydgate and Carpenter's views, see Rodriguez, "'With the grace of God,'" 202–6, particularly 204–5.

<sup>53</sup> Dunbar's poem "To the Merchantis of Edinburgh" expresses the court's critical view of the burgh's poor conditions due to misadministration; on this, see Jack, "Dramatic Voice," 74–75. Dunbar's position as courtly poet is discussed in Simpson Ross, *William Dunbar*, 61–75 (on *Blyth Aberdane*, see 72–74), in Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, 80–81, and in Jack, "Dramatic Voice," 73, 76, 78–80. A commentary on Dunbar's descriptions of James IV's courtly celebrations can be found in Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament*, 173–74.

<sup>54</sup> The poem's purpose is discussed in Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, 82.

entries of civic “taming” and ceremonial inclusion of the natural and the unruly, represented by vibrant trees and sprouting branches temporarily conjured within a celebrating burgh, but also by the willing participation of Highlanders and Moors (whose significance is analyzed in the next section).<sup>55</sup> The guest’s movement between stationary entertainments was a required element of triumphal entries, and Dunbar’s poetic description follows the queen’s progress from Aberdeen’s civic gate to her lodgings. However, the “thow gart” with which Dunbar introduces the appearance of the Bruce and some of the other performers in the poem means “to cause something to be done,” or “to make or cause a person to do something.”<sup>56</sup> This peremptory summons at the presence of a temporarily stationary royal guest who is fully in the limelight, is somehow mismatched with the giant’s terrifying persona. The Bruce approaches Margaret mounted, no doubt an impressive sight, but as many giants of folklore he is actually cast in a passive, non-speaking role, being observed, judged, objectified, commemorated, and spoken about *by others*—before being quickly supplanted by nameless, average-size Stewart kings waving greenery who shift the focus from glorious semi-mythical ancestry to upcoming dynastic renovation.<sup>57</sup> When considering the whole event, the terrifying giant Bruce’s role appears unexpectedly restricted in scope and stage-time, offering him limited agency before the ceremony swiftly tunes up the flattery by focusing upon a hoped-for happy future of Margaret’s own making.

The giant’s fading from the stage of civic celebration matches his extremely brief presence in Scotland’s triumphal entries in general: while the 1511 entry is the first of a sequence of eight such celebrations, giants do not figure in any of the successive events.<sup>58</sup> As in some other north European countries, after the Reformation religious considerations could have diminished the appeal of folkloric popular entertainments—but there is more.<sup>59</sup> In 1511, the narrative of the celebration progressed from contemplation of the giant Bruce as martial anti-English hero of old, to rejoicing over a future of dynastic intermingling with the English line. This heralded a similar change of

55 The ceremonial taming of natural elements and wild men/Highlanders is discussed in Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries*, 51–55 and 55–64 respectively.

56 “Gar v.”, *Dictionary*. See “thow gart” in context in n. 2 above.

57 Huot, *Outsiders*, 22, presents giants as objectified, passive characters.

58 A full list of triumphal entries in early modern Scotland is given in Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries*, 27–28.

59 For example, the festival giants in Chester were destroyed because of religious scruples in 1599 (but later reinstated and faithfully rebuilt by a different administration); see Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described*, 168.

pace in the Scottish Crown's attitude towards the English "problem"—one that made the martial giant's approach inapplicable and *passé*. As the next section demonstrates, James IV's successors owed their supremacy more to James's diplomacy and Margaret's dynastic connections than to any giant-like bellicose assertiveness, and this justifies the giant's sudden disappearance from Scotland's celebratory language.

### A Short-lived Giant? James IV's Progressive Assimilation of Scotland's Otherness

For outsiders, the Scottish wilderness was deemed a suitably remote, dangerous place for young heroes to prove themselves, like the knight Lyonnell scouting the country for giants to kill in the mid-fourteenth-century anonymous romance *Perceforest*.<sup>60</sup> However, Scotland's own folklore presented a more sympathetic, inclusive treatment of giants and similar "Others." The late fifteenth-century Scottish romance *The Tail of Rauf Coilyear* followed the unlikely coal-worker hero Ralph's adventures, and his meeting with the threatening but also honorable Saracen giant Magog. The landscapes referred to and the language employed in *Rauf Coilyear* indicate the controversial Anglo-Scottish borderlands that stand in for Charlemagne's France, expressing a renewed interest in the cross-Channel political affairs of which James and Margaret's union was part.<sup>61</sup> With both Scotland and England in this period dealing with the construction of national identities, literature on giants offered the opportunity to reflect upon the treatment of different ethnic groups, and of cultural and racial differences.<sup>62</sup> The welcoming into court of the ennobled resourceful commoner Ralph and of the physically and culturally different giant Magog—an enemy whose valor and nobility of spirit were recognized as valuable assets—are reminiscent of the threatening but also enriching presence of heterogeneous Saxons, Anglo-Normans, and Celts in Britain. In remarkably diverse, multilingual Scotland, the Scottish state solved the challenge by "recruiting exceptional others into its ranks," not despite, but actually *because of* their very diversity.<sup>63</sup> The Scottish context in which the Aberdonian giant originated considered his

60 The appearance of giants in the romance *Perceforest* is presented in Huot, *Outsiders*, 117.

61 On the romance *Rauf Coilyear* see Schiff, "Sovereign Exception," and in relation to Anglo-Franco-Scottish situation, particularly 33–34, 38–41.

62 For giants as literary representations of ethnic diversity, see Huot, *Outsiders*, 1.

63 Schiff, "Sovereign Exception," 44. This is presented within a broader discussion on Scottish multiculturalism and inclusivity, in 43–45.

"Otherness" as empowering, and as a potential resource—in marked contrast to Monmouth's tale where the giants' forced retreat to remote margins before being exterminated, effectively negated the possibility of cooperative coexistence of different groups as a diverse society.<sup>64</sup> Sixteenth-century England was unsettled by Britain's irritatingly entrenched cultural diversity, and the literary giants of the Elizabethan period still represented the Scots, the Welsh, and by extension the Irish as "the Other within the island itself, awaiting assimilation."<sup>65</sup>

Scotland's cultural inclusiveness contextualizes the presence of the giant in Aberdeen as a cooperative but unbowed civic representative: the assimilation of another out-of-the-ordinary character of folklore—the wild man, and his real-life counterpart, the Highlander—during James IV's reign provides insight into the reasons for the giant's disappearance following 1511. While they were not necessarily much larger than humans, wild men presented strong similarities with giants. Both were creatures of excess, whose uncompromising physicality represented more instinctual, hyper-sexed versions of the knights themselves, embodying the threat and the attraction of man's liberating, unbridled natural state.<sup>66</sup> Like giants, wild men appeared as foundational native characters in literature and the arts in most European countries, liminal creatures inhabiting physical, historical, and cultural gray areas, of solitary and aggressive disposition, but also displaying innate virtues and the potential for conversion. Scotland's own "wild men"—the Highlanders—were described by early modern foreign travelers with a mixture of horror, disdain, and awe as a breed of men just as brutal, rough, and wild as the northern regions they inhabited. Scottish humanists' depictions of the Highlanders instead focused sympathetically on their bravery and physical toughness, relating their simplicity of customs to moral uprightness, and hailing the nobility of their unspoiled life close to nature.<sup>67</sup>

64 The significance of the geographical marginality of the giants' retreats is discussed in Patterson, "Reading the Medieval," 289–90.

65 Schmidt, *Renaissance Hybrids*, 59; this position is presented by Schmidt within a broader discussion on the uneasy English approach to cultural integration during the Tudor period, in 57–59.

66 Sandidge, "Gawain, Giants, and Tennis," 482–84 discusses giants' lifestyle choices and personalities as both negative and appealing. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality*, 6–8 presents wild men as the knights' alter-egos. Overall considerations on wild men's attributes as similar to those of the giants can be found in Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, 9–11, 16–18, 49–84, and 160.

67 Highlanders' wild reputation as native "Others" is discussed extensively in Williamson, "Scots, Indians and Empire," 47–48, 50–52, and 55, while Moret, "Scottish Humanists' Views,"

This dual representation—of giants and of wild men/Highlanders—as both defining and disquieting native “Others” is related to James IV’s own struggles with the instinctual wilderness of his country—and with his own personal conflicts, and it will become significant when we consider the king’s response to the Aberdonian giant. Mistrusted by his unpopular father James III (1451–1488), the young prince James was encouraged to lead an uncomplicated, hedonistic, outdoorsy lifestyle, before becoming involved in the armed uprising leading to his father’s death. In 1488, fifteen-year-old James was crowned under dark suspicions of rebellion, treason, and even parricide, a heinous reputation he did his utmost to counter throughout his life through public and private displays of composure and penance. During James IV’s internationally renowned tournaments of the Wild Knight and the Black Lady (1507 and 1508), his use of the visual language of the costumed tournament both acknowledged and distanced himself from his intemperate youth. After winning the tournament as a masked participant donning skins and horns, James’s immediate, very public discarding of his Wild Knight costume to reveal his royal self, gave him the opportunity to symbolically discard his wild youthful behavior and recast himself as a trustworthy, restrained monarch.<sup>68</sup> Throughout his reign, the Gaelic-speaking, well-traveled, and outdoor-loving James both engaged with Scotland’s wilder side and brought it to heel, working with the Highlands’ chiefs in distant corners of his realm. Scotland’s “Otherness” was not silenced or denied, but rather cautiously included in the narrative: throughout the sixteenth century, wild men and Highlanders frequently appeared in courtly and civic performance in cooperative, supportive roles, being recognized as foundational components of Scottish identity with both unease and pride.<sup>69</sup>

As a well-educated, art-loving, and courteous Renaissance prince, James deliberately constructed his royal persona around the myth of a new king Arthur, the mythical chivalric hero bringing forth a new Golden Age by defusing the threat of savage warfare.<sup>70</sup> He did so by including Arthurian traditions, references, and terminology in the ceremonies and experiences of his own reign; his transformation of royal fortresses into elegant Renaissance

326–32 offers a more positive view of their customs and reputation. An overview of both positions can be found in Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries*, 57–64.

68 James’s tournaments are discussed extensively in Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament*, 237–43.

69 Mickel, “Our Hielandmen,” 195, 202, brings examples of cultural inclusiveness during James V’s and Mary Queen of Scots’ reigns (James IV’s son and granddaughter respectively).

70 Carpenter discusses the cultural refinement of James IV’s court in “‘To the xaltacyon of noblesse,’” 3–9.

palaces stood for his progressive distancing from Scotland's traditionally martial culture.<sup>71</sup> In 1578, the Scottish historian John Leslie (1527–1596) compared James's exceptional performance as Wild Knight to that of "a knycht of King Arthuris brocht vp in the wodis," hence underlining how the king's innate moral qualities shone through his unconventional upbringing, and how the threatening physicality represented by his discarded costume could become an asset when subordinated to a higher chivalric cause.<sup>72</sup> As David Parkinson has observed, "counterfeiting savagery enabled James IV to lay claim to Arthurian tradition on Scottish terms," in the process transforming Scotland's unruly nobility into faithful, learned knights imbued with humanistic principles, and countering English proprietary claims to British sovereignty via the mythical ancestors and giant-slayers Brutus and King Arthur.<sup>73</sup> In the guise of Arthur, James himself had access to the symbolic potential granted by the mythical king's role as champion of order and as a destroyer of giants. Arthur performed this role through assimilation and taming, like the reformed and baptized Jayant Sans Nom (Giant Without Name) in the Arthurian novel *Chevalier du Papegau* (Knight of the Parrot, late fourteenth, early fifteenth century) or more frequently through physical annihilation, casting the king as defender of the realm against chaos, violence, and moral corruption. However, Arthur's killing of giants in Arthurian literature also revealed a painful personal quest driven by self-scrutiny and penance, for example when the king overthrows but also shamefully covets the giant Ritho's aggressive, unbridled potency, represented by possession of the latter's gory cloak. Similarly, for the penitent fratricide Gieffroy Ala Grand Dent—disturbed hero of Jean d'Arras's romance *Mélusine* (1392–94)—slaying a giant represented the pivotal moment in

71 James's interest in Arthurian lore, extending to naming his eldest son Arthur, is discussed in Stevenson, *Chivalry and Knighthood*, 187, and Stevenson, "Chivalry, British Sovereignty," 611–12. On the naming of the Scottish mountain of Arthur Seat during James IV's reign, see Mackechnie, "Historical Landscapes," 216–17. A comparison between James's and King Arthur's crusading interests is made in Bovaird-Abbo, "Reirdit on ane riche roche," 682–87.

72 Leslie, *Historie of Scotland*, 2:128. The tournament is also described by the Scottish historian Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie (ca. 1532–1580); Pitscottie, *Historie and Cronicles*, 1:242–44. Pitscottie's incredulous disbelief at the disguised king's martial prowess is commented upon in 243. For a contextualized overview, see also Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries*, 63.

73 Parkinson, "Scottish Prints," 307. An investigation of the role of the Arthur myth in Anglo-Scottish relations in this period can be found in Stevenson, "Chivalry, British Sovereignty," 604–6, and in Stevenson, *Chivalry and Knighthood*, 188–89. England's own appropriation of the Arthurian tale, particularly in relation to giants, is discussed in Carley and Crick, "Constructing Albion's Past," 42–43, and in Mason, "Scotching the brut," 61–63. Specifically, Edward I's Arthurian pretensions are discussed in Loomis, "Edward I" and can be compared with Scotland's own Arthurian revival in Bovaird-Abbo, "Reirdit on ane riche roche," 676–77.

his redemptive quest to gain self-restraint and salvation.<sup>74</sup> This would have resonated with an ever-contrite, troubled James suspected of parricide since his wild teenage years, offering the opportunity to channel his sinful aggressiveness into redemptive, selfless challenges.

Like a new Arthur, James had subdued the disorderly aspects of his country, his subjects, and his own youthful base instincts, discarding the rough disguise of the pleasure-seeking wild man and, I would argue, the bellicose impulses of the giant within. Through a policy of self-restrained diplomacy rather than impetuous warfare, James strived to bring progress and stability to a reign scarred by recurring Anglo-Scottish conflicts. In the 1511 entry, the Aberdonian giant stood as a reminder of a glorious but also bygone warring past, one that the chivalric, mature, contrite James himself had symbolically vanquished. While *the Bruce* would endure as average-bodied royal ancestor, *the giant*, inhabiting a world of cultural remoteness and symbolizing aggressive, victorious resistance to English assimilation, had lost its relevance.

### Conclusion: James IV's Overcoming of Bruce the Giant, and a Post-Union World

The presence of a giant representing King Robert the Bruce in 1511 Aberdeen—a burgh with a special connection with the struggles and violence experienced by Scotland during the Wars of Independence—was an appropriate, time-critical response to the political and cultural context.<sup>75</sup> Aberdeen's established tradition and know-how of parading disruptive but also protective leaders (the Abbot of Bon Accord, Robin Hood, and the Emperor), prepared the ground for the appearance of a nuanced, multifaceted processional giant. As a three-dimensional expression of a literary tradition of Scottish giants, its presence experientially addressed the relationship between heroic championship, national identity, and the menace and promise bestowed by giant ancestry and one's own Otherness within.<sup>76</sup>

74 Huot, *Outsiders*, 114–16 presents the slaying of giants as a potentially redemptive quest. On Arthur as a killer of giants see Huot, *Outsiders*, 57, 66, and Morris, *King Arthur*, 76–77. Arthur keeps for himself Ritho's cloak made of flayed beards taken from murdered adversaries, adding to it slayed Ritho's own beard. On Gieffroy's quest see Huot, *Outsiders*, 66–68, and 79.

75 The historicized, semi-mythical relevance of Robert the Bruce is discussed in Boardman and Foran, "Introduction," 24.

76 The Bruce's role within a literary and folkloric tradition of Scottish giants is explored in Fisher, "Crying of ane Playe," 32–33.



The Aberdonian giant *redivivus* responded to the resurgence in the early 1510s of English nation-making myths; his very presence negated the validity of Monmouth's literary slaying of native giants as a precedent for the uncompromising submission of neighboring Scottish "Others" to English authority. However, James IV's handling of the English problem was significantly different from the Bruce's own giant-like violence and intransigence. Like a new Arthur, James challenged the values the Aberdonian giant represented; his forward-thinking kingship based on diplomacy, national reorganization, and prestigious cultural pursuits queried the viability of the military brutality of the Bruce's times, which the giant's oversized body personified.<sup>77</sup> As a nation-maker ancestor of the Stewart royal line, the Bruce's presence represented the mythical past's legitimization of the current forms of power, but the emphasis on a past of anti-English warfare also foreshadowed his disappearance from later Scottish triumphal entries.<sup>78</sup> The branches "new and green" waved by the royal ancestors who supplanted the retreating Bruce in Aberdeen, hint at a future where Margaret's assimilation into the Stewart line—rather than conflict—would bring the Stewarts supremacy over the whole of Britain.

The Bruce might be the only appearance of the aggressively anti-English, appealingly protective, traditionally inward-looking Scottish giant, but in a post-1604 pan-British narrative, giants—always about to go extinct, but always resurfacing—demonstrated their lasting potential to represent (a different kind of) "Otherness" that was still essential to the narrative.<sup>79</sup> This evolution in the figure of the giant was European-wide: during sixteenth-century festive civic events, the defeat, taming, or urbanization of giants came to represent superseded, old-fashioned models of authority and world-views, now perceived as unnatural and hideous as the giant's monstrous body.<sup>80</sup> In Antwerp in 1549, the giant Antigon's submission mirrored that of the municipal government under Philip II's enlightened new rule, while in seventeenth-century London, Corineus (transformed from a giant-killer to a giant himself) and Gogmagog—traditionally royal supporters—took up

77 The Bruce's despicable actions, varying from deceitfulness to assassination, reveal a giant-like self-serving *modus operandi*; this is discussed in Grant, "Death of John Comyn," 178–181, 201–2, and can be compared with giants' common personality traits as explored in Huot, *Outsiders*, 3.

78 Giants are presented as legitimizing figures in Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 41. For example, the backing offered by giant performers to Elizabeth Tudor during her entry into London in 1558 supported the queen's authority; see Scherb, "Assimilating Giants," 73–74.

79 The long-lasting popularity of giants as supportive figures during festivals and entertainments is explored by Huot, *Outsiders*, 63–64.

80 For example, the giants Grimaut and Gardon are presented as metaphors of old-fashioned, dispensable feudal traditions; *ibid.*, 76–77.

residence in the London Guildhall instead, to endorse the city's novel role as a financial and mercantile powerhouse of the burgeoning British empire.<sup>81</sup> While giants as anti-English champions disappeared in Scottish ceremonies, their servile, obsequious presence in ceremonies in London represented a novel, disquieting take on the giant-related tale of English supremacy over the Scots. In the Lord Mayor's Show in London in 1605, Corineus and Gogmagog appeared in chains, acting as docile guides to a manicured mountain—the antithesis of the wilderness in which they traditionally roamed free.<sup>82</sup> They acted as attendants to the figure of a ruling Britannia, together with subservient personifications of native potentates and natural forces, including previously independent nations, cities, and rivers. This visually demonstrated the reassembling of outsiders made possible by the Union of the Scottish and English Crowns in 1603 by James VI/I, Margaret and James IV's great-grandson.<sup>83</sup> The staged dialogue between Brutus and Britannia directly presents James VI/I as a second Brutus who unifies the land, overcoming Gogmagog's barbarous breed of native giants.<sup>84</sup> While it was a Scot who had inherited the English throne, the wealthier, more populous, and larger southern neighbor inevitably established itself as the majority partner in the Anglo-Scottish partnership. In a process that started with James IV's Arthurian view of kingship, the Scottish "Otherness" embodied by the Aberdonian Bruce was finally contained, but to the advantage of a very "bottom-heavy," England-centric Britain.

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81 On Antwerp, see Howe, "Introduction," 8, and on London, see Scherb, "Assimilating Giants," 75–76, and Withington, *English Pageantry*, 1:55. Also see n. 41 above for Corineus's transformation to giant stature.

82 The Show is a yearly parade celebrating the appointment of London's mayor.

83 The pageant with Britannia is discussed in Fairholt, "Lord Mayors' Pageants," 30, and Scherb, "Assimilating Giants," 74–75.

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## 5. Giants and Dwarfs in the Tyrolean Courts: Documents, Portraits, and the *Kunst- und Wunderkammer* at Schloss Ambras\*

*Hansjörg Rabanser*

### Abstract

In imagination and legend, the Alps have functioned as the dwelling place of giants and dwarfs. However, in the Tyrol by the late fifteenth century “real” individuals characterized as having macrosomia (gigantism) and microsomia (dwarfism) had begun to find a prominent place in the Habsburg courts. One of the most enthusiastic proponents of this princely fashion was Archduke Ferdinand II (1529–1595) who not only included giants and dwarfs in his household, but also began collecting their portraits and related paraphernalia in his *Kunst- und Wunderkammer* at Schloss Ambras. This essay establishes the importance of giants and dwarfs in the Tyrolean courts and their centrality to Ferdinand’s collection, which duly testifies to a shared taste among the German-speaking courts.

**Keywords:** Archduke Ferdinand II, Archduke Sigmund, Habsburg, Innsbruck, Thome[r]le, cabinets of curiosities

Popular characters in the medieval chivalric romances, giants and dwarfs also figured in the legendary accounts which accorded them special powers

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in the Tyrol. The very idea that the hostile, suspicious, or treasure-guarding creatures predominantly lived out their existence in wild mountain landscapes made the Alpine region their ideal place of residence.<sup>1</sup> The giant Grim or the dwarf king Laurin from the legends surrounding the hero Dietrich von Bern are vivid examples of this. In the course of their adventures, the central hero of the epic (which can be traced back to the ninth century, but certainly goes back to an earlier narrative tradition) and his companions must repeatedly fight supernatural enemies who have settled in the inaccessible and forbidding mountain world of the Alps; thus these legendary beings form the counter-world to that of the humans and to civilization.<sup>2</sup> There was also the mythical giant Haymon, who is said to have lived in the ninth century, and is traditionally considered to be the founder of Wilten Premonstratensian Monastery in Innsbruck.<sup>3</sup> Having killed the dragon who had destroyed the monastery several times, Haymon was later honored with a polychrome wooden statue (ca. 1460–70) erected in the church of the monastery itself. The statue shows Haymon standing on a small platform with an inscription and displaying the snake-like red dragon's tongue in his hand to assert his victory over the monastery's evil foe (figure 5.1).

That the monastery sought to honor its founding with the statue of an imaginary giant is notable in itself, but it also attests to the flourishing period interest in "real" giants, who, like dwarfs, often took up residence in royal and princely courts.<sup>4</sup> There they joined physically or mentally challenged individuals, as well as people with special abilities or those from foreign countries who were brought to Europe by the voyages of discovery and exploitative colonialism. Increasingly treated as marvels, in this *Theatrum mundi* those individuals characterized as having macrosomia and

1 On the fabulous properties of giants and dwarfs, see Avanzini and Kustatscher, "Riesen aus Stein," 9–42; Bellinger, "Knaurs Lexikon," 423–24, 426–27, 567; Biedermann, "Knaurs Lexikon," 360–61, 505–6; Habiger-Tuczay, "Zwerge und Riesen," 635–58; Jontes, "Hilfreich und hinterlistig," 133–40; and Petzoldt, "Kleines Lexikon," 146–47, 196–97. On legendary giants and dwarfs from Tyrol, see Fink, "Riesen in Südtirol," 170–77; Liebus, "Sagenhafte Lebewesen," 79–92; Martinus, "Tiroler Riesen," 1–2; Steiner, "Sagenhafte Herrscher," 122–41; Weinold, "Der Hacksteiner Riese," 134–35; and Windhager, "Von den Riesen," 5.

2 Avanzini and Kustatscher treat Dietrich von Bern, the dwarf king Laurin and the giant Grim in "Riesen aus Stein," 39–42. Also see Kropik, "Dietrich von Bern," 55–60; Kühebacher, "Deutsche Heldenepik"; and Wolff, "König Laurin."

3 On the legend of Haymon see especially Seemüller, "Die Wiltener Gründungssage."

4 On court or show giants and dwarfs, see Bauer, "Hofriesen und Schauriesen," 109–21; Enderle and Unverfehrt, "Kleinwuchs," 87–133, 150–75; Hampe, "Die fahrenden Leute"; and Holländer, "Wunder." Dwarfs also acted as living guides conducting visitors through collections of arts and curiosities; see Bredekamp, "Antikensehnsucht," 46–47, and Mauries, "Das Kuriositätenkabinett," 146–47.



Figure 5.1 Statue of the giant Haymon, ca. 1460–70. Wood, Wilten Collegiate Church, Innsbruck. Photo: Hansjörg Rabanser.

microsomia—that is, giants and dwarfs—represented a special feature as they challenged the notion of normality with their unique bodily structures.<sup>5</sup> As “natural wonders” (*mirabilia*) their portraits and related objects—alleged

5 On macrosomia (gigantism) see the succinct discussion by the Mayo Clinic, “Agromegaly”; for microsomia, Mayo Clinic, “Dwarfism,” and Salfellner, “Zwergwuchs,” 11–18. Around 200



Figure 5.2 Gabriel Bodenehr the Elder, *View of Schloss Ambras*. Copper engraving from *Curioses Staats und Kriegs Theatrum* (Augsburg, after 1717/20). Photo: Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck.

giants' bones and relics—were frequently put on display in the cabinets of curiosities (*Kunst- und Wunderkammern*) that were an important part of the history of collecting in the early modern era.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most significant *Kunstkammern* established in this period was at Schloss Ambras, one palace of Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol (1529–1595) located outside Innsbruck (figure 5.2).<sup>7</sup> A prominent member of the House of Habsburg—Ferdinand was the nephew of Emperor Charles V (r. 1519–56) and the son of Emperor Ferdinand I (r. 1556–64)—the archduke sought to make his mark as a humanist prince. He not only collected portraits

different forms of microsomia are known today, of which achondroplasia is the most common and therefore also the best known.

6 Fossil bones (of dinosaurs, mammoths, whales, etc.) are still displayed today in various collections or churches as giants' bones, as for example the bone in the vestibule of the collegiate church in Innichen/San Candido in South Tyrol. On the subject see also Seipel, "Alle Wunder dieser Welt," 151–53.

7 As well as my essays, "Plaz, Plaz'" and "Largo, Largo'," fundamental scholarship on the *Kunst- und Wunderkammer* at Schloss Ambras includes that by Auer et al., "Schloß Ambras"; Luchner, "Denkmal eines Renaissancefürsten"; Sandbichler, "souil schönen, kostlichen und verwunderlichen zeügs," 167–93; Scheicher, "Die Kunstkammer"; Scheicher, "Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern"; Seipel, "Alle Wunder dieser Welt"; and Seipel, "Meisterwerke der Sammlungen." The natural objects and human collectibles in the Ambras collections are treated by Flieger and Schönwiese, "Das Bildnis eines behinderten Mannes"; Luchner, "Schloss Ambras für Mediziner," 60–64; Rauch, "Gesammelte Wunder," 11–15; and Rauch, "Der Mensch als Sammelobjekt," 133–35.

and memorabilia of the giants and dwarfs at his own court, but he also acquired their portraits from other courts, which were sometimes copies of the paintings from their own holdings.<sup>8</sup> An especially important contact was with the court in Munich, ruled by Ferdinand's brother-in-law Albrecht V of Bavaria (1528–1579) and subsequently by his son Wilhelm V (1548–1626), who were developing their own *Kunstkammer* as part of a campaign to turn Munich into a site of courtly display.

This essay treats some of the “real” giants and dwarfs who were affiliated with the courts in Innsbruck and Schloss Ambras, and/or who were represented in portraits that were part of the Schloss Ambras *Kunstkammer*.<sup>9</sup> While other Habsburg rulers are brought into the discussion, the focus is primarily on Archduke Ferdinand II, who accorded great importance to these “living marvels.”<sup>10</sup> Thanks to his initiatives, the Schloss Ambras collection became an important repository for portraits of giants and dwarfs and other exotic objects, which continued to earn acclaim well after his death.

## Giants at the Tyrolean Courts

The earliest record of a giant in the Tyrolean court identifies him as Niklas Haidl, who in 1487 was accepted into the service of Archduke Sigmund (r. 1477–96), residing at the Hofburg, the official Habsburg palace in Innsbruck.<sup>11</sup> In the corresponding letter, Haidl vowed to serve his employer faithfully for the rest of his life and also to stand ready for military service, offering to pay for his own armor, a servant, and two horses himself. In turn, the archduke promised him 100 guilders for his service. A green seal on this

8 For the reconstruction of the *Kunst- und Wunderkammer* at Schloss Ambras with the hanging of the portraits of the giants, see Sandbichler, “Reconstruction,” 411.

9 Another notable Tyrolean giant is Bernardo Gigli (1726–1791), whom I discuss in Rabanser, “Plaz, Plaz,” 248–56 and “Largo, Largo,” 248–56.

10 As Margócsy observes, “the world of princely *Kunstkammern* relied on a small, tight-knit network of people, which ensured that developments in one town strongly influenced the collecting practices in others”; “Horses, Curiosities, and the Culture of Collection,” 1212.

11 For details on Haidl, see Rabanser, “Der Burgriese Niklas Haidl,” 7–45. See also Anonymus, “Es war einmal,” 24–25; Gruber, “Zur Geschichte des Innsbrucker Riesenskelettes,” 954–59; Lampert and Rhomberg, “+ 148 Stufen,” 14–17; Luchner, “Schloss Ambras für Mediziner,” 63; and Pfaundler, “Wen ohrfeigte der Hofzwerg,” 92–94. According to popular tradition, Haidl was purportedly married to Barbara, one of the archduke's numerous illegitimate daughters. However, it should be noted that Niklas's brother Utz Haidl was married to a certain Barbara, suggesting that it was likely a mistake that was passed on in the literature. See TLA, Raitbuch 1493/III, vol. 36, fol. 56r; and Granichstaedten-Czerva, “Uneheliche Kinder,” 35.

letter indicates that Haidl had a coat of arms showing an elephant carrying a tower, likely an allusion to his gigantic stature and/or his herculean strength.<sup>12</sup> Haidl's exact role at Sigmund's court remains unclear, although in another letter from 1490 he is referred to as a *Türhütter* (gatekeeper), his height of approximately 2.23 meters (or 7.3 feet) tall deemed advantageous to his position as a sentry.<sup>13</sup> In addition to wage payments, other donations from the archduke to the giant are documented around 1482, when he received a plot of land. Haidl and presumably his heirs were also given a vineyard in Staufen in the Breisgau (in the "Vorlande", an area subject to the Habsburg family).<sup>14</sup> The giant also seems to have curried favor with Maximilian I (then ruling as King of the Romans, 1486–1519). Records indicate that *Lanng Nicolasch* (Tall Nicholas, *Lanng* a generic nickname referring to his giant stature) was also endowed with the fief for Schloss Rosenegg above Bürs near Bludenz (in Vorarlberg) on April 10, 1490.<sup>15</sup>

In a further act of beneficence, in the vicinity of the Hofburg palace, Archduke Sigmund had special housing built for Haidl, or at least structurally adapted, because its ceilings were designed to be taller for its oversized resident.<sup>16</sup> The facade of the so-called Burgriesenhaus (House of the Court Giant), where Haidl resided until 1491, boasts a niche that once housed his sandstone sculpture. Measuring about 2.69 meters tall (half a meter higher than his presumed height), it was created in 1494 by the well-known local stonemason Niklas Türing the Elder, who is also considered to be the builder of Haidl's house (figure 5.3).<sup>17</sup> The statue shows the giant adorned in full armor and holding a club at his feet, aspects of appearance that may allude to Haidl having served Sigmund in a military capacity (as his letter of 1487 attests). According to documentary sources, the monumental sculpture was originally meant to function as a reclining figure on the

12 TLA, Schatzarchiv, Urkunde I/5057, no. 1 (March 20, 1487).

13 TLA, Schatzarchiv, Urkunde I/675 (February 20, 1490).

14 The wage payments are listed in TLA, Handschrift 118, fol. 142r; and TLA, KKB Raitbuch 1487, vol. 21, fol. 515. The plot of land awarded to Haidl is contained in documents in TLA, Schatzarchiv, Putsch-Repertorium, vol. 3, p. 1298; and TLA, Schatzarchiv, Urkunde I/7018, no. 2 (July 1, 1482). For the vineyard, see TLA, Schatzarchiv, Putsch-Repertorium, vol. 1, p. 402, 513; and TLA, Lehenamtsbücher 1448–1489, vol. 1/6, fol. 555r, 561r.

15 TLA, Kopialbuch 1490–1493, Lit. M–N, no. 11–12, fol. 65r. Maximilian later ruled as Holy Roman Emperor 1508–19.

16 Felmayer, "Die profanen Kunstdenkmäler," 207–10; Gorican, "Das Burgriesenhaus," 5–6; Granichstaedten-Czerva, "Alt-Innsbrucker Stadthäuser," 17–18; Hammer, "Die Paläste," 61–62; and Rabanser, "Der Burgriese Niklas Haidl," 15–27.

17 Weighing approximately one ton, the statue is known as the oldest profane sculpture in the Gothic style in Innsbruck.



Figure 5.3 Postcard with the statue of the giant Niklas Haidl in his place of residence, Burgriesenhaus, Innsbruck. Photography from 1913 by Würthle & Sohn, Salzburg. Photo: Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck.

giant's tomb, covering his sarcophagus, which was provided with a Latin grave inscription.<sup>18</sup> After the cemetery around the parish church St. Jakob in Innsbruck was cleared in 1510, Haidl's tomb was destroyed, with only

<sup>18</sup> An entry on the production costs in the government account book of December 20, 1494 indicates that the sculpture was originally part of his grave; TLA, KKB Raitbuch 1494/II, vol. 37,

the statue remaining; it was subsequently placed in the niche at his former residence.<sup>19</sup>

In 1866, during reconstruction work for the parish church an extensive burial ground was uncovered, with one of the graves found to have contained Haidl's remains.<sup>20</sup> His bones were subsequently given to Prof. Dr. Karl Dantscher (1813–1887), the first holder of the Chair of Anatomy in Innsbruck. Dantscher tried to reconstruct Haidl's skeleton but since the hands and feet, as well as five cervical vertebrae were missing, wooden replacement pieces were added.<sup>21</sup> To this day, the giant's skeleton is housed in the museum of the Anatomical Institute of the University of Innsbruck (figure 5.4). Medical and chemical examination of the bones showed that Haidl suffered from the classic symptoms of macrosomia and was, in fact, a eunuch.<sup>22</sup>

Another giant that had connections to the Tyrolean courts has been identified as Bartolomeo (or Giovanni) Bona (Bon). Little is known about the life of the approximately 2.40 meters (7.8 feet) tall giant, other than that he was from Riva del Garda (Trentino) and likely lived and died in Vienna.<sup>23</sup> Even the name Bona seems to be a pseudonym, and was in all probability an assigned nickname referring to the giant's good nature ("Bona" derives from Italian *buono*, in the sense of being good-natured). In 1560 Bona appeared at a tournament in Vienna that Archduke Maximilian (Emperor from 1564) held in honor of his father Emperor Ferdinand I (r. 1556–64).<sup>24</sup> A written account records the appearance of the giant, who accompanied the eight-year-old Archduke Rudolf (1552–1612).<sup>25</sup> An illustration of the event

fol. 129v. On the sculpture and the inscription, see Rabanser, "Der Burgriese Niklas Haidl," 29–38; and Rabanser, "Maximilian I."

19 The niche on the building is empty today, however, because the owner of the house gave the sculpture to the city of Innsbruck in 1893, on condition that it would donate 300 guilders to the city's donation fund to aid the poor. Due to a legal dispute with the current homeowner, it was no longer possible to display it at the original location, whereupon the sculpture found a new home in the staircase of the old town hall, where it can still be admired.

20 Contemporary newspapers reported on the discovery, which they described in detail; *Innsbrucker Nachrichten* 13 (1866), 1273–74; and *Volks- und Schützen-Zeitung* 21(1866), 365.

21 About the reconstruction, see *Volks- und Schützen-Zeitung* 22 (1867), 283.

22 For clinical diagnosis, see Gruber, "Zur Geschichte des Innsbrucker Riesenskelettes," 957. Haidl died childless and his brother Utz Haidl inherited his weapons. See TLA, Schatzarchiv, Urkunde I/3199 (June 15, 1494).

23 Luchner, "Schloss Ambras für Mediziner," 62; and Menghin, "Riesen aus Wälschtirol," 224.

24 Pfaffenbichler, "Das Turnier," 279–81 and 347 (cat. no.: III.23–27); and Seipel (ed.), "Wir sind Helden," 80.

25 The document dates the event June 12, 1560. TLA, Ferdinandea, Pos. 175 (Turniersachen). See also NÖLA, Ständisches Archiv, Hs 71, p. 226. For the full description in German, see Rabanser,



Figure 5.4 Skeleton of the giant Niklas Haidl as part of an exhibition at the Fortezza Fortress (South Tyrol), 2009. Photo: Hansjörg Rabanser.

shows Bona, disguised as a hairy wild man, towering over the youth who is outfitted in full armor.<sup>26</sup> Notably, the giant also wears a wreath of leaves on his head and around his loins and holds a large uprooted deciduous tree in his hand—popular giant's attributes (as seen in figure I.4).<sup>27</sup>

Further traces of the giant Bona can be found at Schloss Ambras. Upon entering the first *Rüstkammer* (armory) there, one's gaze is immediately drawn to a sculptural group that includes the gigantic wooden model of Bartolomeo Bona in armor which today is surrounded by mannequins wearing what seems to be boys' armor (figure 5.5).<sup>28</sup> The 2.60 meters tall

"Plaz, Plaz," 243 and "Largo, Largo," 243.

<sup>26</sup> Illustrated in Rabanser, "Plaz, Plaz," 244 (fig. 105) and "Largo, Largo," 244 (fig. 105).

<sup>27</sup> KHM, Kunstkammer, inv. no. 6564, fol. 16. See also Ferino-Padgen, "Arcimboldo," 265–66; Haag and Swoboda, "Feste feiern," 180–183; Seipel, "Wir sind Helden," 76–77; and Seipel, "Prinzenrolle," 93–94.

<sup>28</sup> Alleged to be one of the oldest surviving museum mannequins in Europe, the wooden model of Bona remained unnoticed for a long time in the depot, but is now back in its original location





Figure 5.5 Wooden mannequin of Bartolomeo Bona in armor. Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck. Photo: Hansjörg Rabanser.

mannequin with portrait-like features wears the giant's half armor and red and white clothing. Its powerful appearance was further enhanced by the addition of a helmet plume and its juxtaposition with the smaller armors.<sup>29</sup> Seventeenth-century visitors to Schloss Ambras were especially impressed by this display as the numerous references in inventories and travel descriptions suggest.<sup>30</sup> Among those commenting were Philipp Hainhofer (1578–1647),

after the reconstruction of Archduke Ferdinand II's collections according to the descriptions contained in an inventory of 1583. See KHM, Hofjagd- und Rüstkammer, inv. no. A 634; and Luchner, "Denkmal eines Renaissancefürsten," 18.

29 On the figure, see Auer et al., "Schloß Ambras," 19–20; Gruber, "Zur Geschichte des Innsbrucker Riesenskelettes," 959; Haag and Swoboda, "Feste feiern," 179; Luchner, "Denkmal eines Renaissancefürsten," 18–19, 106–07; Rabanser, "'Plaz, Plaz,'" 246, and "Largo, Largo," 246; Rauch, "Kleider machen Leute," 49–51; and Seipel, "Meisterwerke der Sammlungen," 40–41.

30 So popular was the mannequin of Bona in armor that it was illustrated in a caricature in 1877. The image shows a sophisticated gentleman in tails and top hat beholding the massive sculpture that is almost twice his size. The accompanying slogan "Es scheint, dass die Männer von Einst doch kräftiger waren als wir Männer von Jetzt" (It seems that the men of yore were stronger than us men of now); TLMF, W 25863. On the caricature, see Rabanser, "'Plaz, Plaz,'" 239 (fig. 103) and "Largo, Largo," 239 (fig. 103).

diplomat, businessman, and art agent from Augsburg, and the German archaeologist and travel writer Johann Georg Keyssler (1693–1743). In their observations, they took special notice of the presentation of the giant's armor in combination with the significantly smaller armor, which was alleged to belong to the dwarf Thome[r]le (of whom we will speak later).<sup>31</sup> Considering the great expense that went into fabricating these armorial accouterments, their exhibition together in Ferdinand's *Rüstkammer* can only have added to the impression of grandeur of the archducal collection.

Bona is also traditionally thought to be the giant who appears in the double portrait that was part of the Schloss Ambras collection. The unusual portrait depicts a life-sized representation of the giant and the court dwarf Thome[r]le evidently scaled to their actual size (see figure 11.7).<sup>32</sup> The two are shown standing next to each other in a sparse interior, the giant dressed in colorful garments, with a sword at his side and holding a hat with a huge white feather. Reaching up to his knee is a tiny dwarf dressed in black, wearing a gold chain and with his hand on his miniature sword. Notably, while the inventories typically identify the dwarf as Thome[r]le, the giant is never given a name.<sup>33</sup> In fact recent scholarship, which compares various image sources, has challenged Bona's identification, positing instead that the giant is actually Anton Fran[c]k or Franckenpoint (d. 1596) from Geldern (Lower Rhine).<sup>34</sup> This giant, who was said to be 2.50 meters (8.2 feet) tall, was known as "Langer Anton" (Tall Anton), and initially displayed himself in inns before coming to the court of Duke Heinrich-Julius von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1564–1613) in Wolfenbüttel (Lower Saxony).<sup>35</sup>

A lost painting that was once housed in the *Kunstkammer* in the palace in Munich lends support to the theory that the double-portrait in Schloss Ambras represents Fran[c]k. The portrait was described as depicting the

31 TLA, Inventar 40/10, fol. 146v (1603); and TLA, Inventar 40/17 [without fol.], (1628). See also Gruber, "Zur Geschichte des Innsbrucker Riesenskelettes," 958. On Hainhofer's description, see TLMF, Dip. 902, fol. 44r. On Keyssler's description, see Keyssler, "Neueste Reisen," 25–38 (at 27).

32 On the double portrait (265.0 × 160.0 cm), see Haag and Swoboda, "Feste feiern," 179; Hofmann, "Zauber der Medusa," 167; Reinle, "Das stellvertretende Bildnis," 173; Scheicher, "Die Kunstkammer," 153; Scheicher, "Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern," 134; Seipel, "Wir sind Helden," 153–56; and Seipel, "Meisterwerke der Sammlungen," 206–7.

33 TLMF, FB 2119, fol. 235v–236r (1656); and TLMF, FB 2677, fol. 325v (1703). See also Seipel, "Meisterwerke der Sammlungen," 206.

34 To date, there has been no documentary verification of this identification, although the Kunsthistorisches Museum now recognizes Fran[c]k as the giant; see "Der Riese Anton Frank (Franck) mit Zwerg Thomele."

35 Fran[c]k's skeleton is now kept in the Museum Anatomicum of Philipps University in Marburg. On Fran[c]k, see Eser and Armer, "Luther," 132, 179.

giant “Anthoni Francopan” and the dwarf Thome[r]le.<sup>36</sup> (Notably, the Munich *Kunstammer* also housed one of Anton Fran[c]k’s gigantic shoes.) The reappraisal of the giant in the Ambras double portrait as Anton Fran[c]k instead of Bartolomeo Bona may cast doubt on whether Bona and the dwarf Thome[r]le actually knew each other, but they are linked by an anecdote that was passed down in travel guides from early on. According to a contemporary account, Thome[r]le, who was mocked by the giant because of his small size, retaliated by forcing the giant to bend over and then slapping him in the face.<sup>37</sup>

Another portrait on display in the Schloss Ambras *Kunstammer* depicts the giant Hans Kraus (fig. 5.6). Hainhofer was able to see this picture during his visit in 1628, where it was exhibited next to paintings of horses, pigs, and bears of extraordinary size.<sup>38</sup> Kessler also commented on the painting, admiring the picture of what he referred to as “Hans Braw,” whom he compared to the biblical giant Goliath. (He also mentioned a neighboring painting on display (now lost) that depicted a giantess spinning yarn, comparing her height to the legendary giant Haymon).<sup>39</sup> A piece of paper on the back of Hans’s portrait provided his personal information. Although only partially legible, the writing revealed that he was 48 years old, was around 2.87 meters (almost 9.5 feet) tall, and was from the Bailiwick of Hagenau in Alsace. He served at the court of the Rhineland Count Palatine Friedrich II (1482–1556), who had sent the portrait to Ferdinand II. However, the painting must have been in the Hofburg in Innsbruck or the Ruhelust Palace, situated directly next to it, or another of the archduke’s estates. It can only have reached Schloss Ambras after Archduke Ferdinand II’s death in 1595,

36 Diemer, Bujok, and Diemer, “Johann Baptist Fickler,” 66, 195; and Sauerländer, “Die Münchner Kunstammer,” 2:803–4.

37 On the anecdote, see Keyssler, “Neueste Reisen,” 27–28; Roth, “Memorabilia Europae,” 231. See also Pfandl, “Wen ohrfeigte der Hofzwerg,” 92–94.

38 TLMF, Dip. 902, fol. 48r (Hainhofer, 1628). On Kraus, see Gamber and Beaufort-Spontin, “Curiositäten,” 48–49; Gruber, “Zur Geschichte des Innsbrucker Riesenskelettes,” 958; Luchner, “Schloss Ambras für Mediziner,” 62; and Seipel, “Die Entdeckung der Natur,” 149–51. The inclusion of the giant’s portrait with those of animals—especially the horses—reflects the fact that *Kunstammern* in early modern Germanic courts were located above the stables where the prized horses were kept. Ferdinand himself received horses from Spain via the Spanish ambassador, who also supplied horses to the Habsburg emperor; see Margócsy, “Horses, Curiosities, and the Culture of Collection,” with attention to Ferdinand’s horses at 1221, and Hainhofer’s visit at 1236–38.

39 “Die dabey stehende so genannte große Spinnerinn hat bey nahe die Höhe des Aymon, dessen schon gedacht worden ist [...]”; Keyssler, “Neueste Reisen,” 36.



Figure 5.6 Anonymous, *The Giant Hans Kraus*, 1601. Oil on canvas, 290 × 175 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, picture gallery inv. 8300 © KHM-Museumsverband.

since it was first listed in the inventory from 1621.<sup>40</sup> The portrait shows the giant dressed rather simply, outfitted in a dark green tunic with a striped sash, and with a pocket and knife attached to the sash. His noticeably large hands are a typical characteristic of macrosomia, as is his prominent jaw (which ironically is also associated with the Habsburgs).<sup>41</sup> The artist of the canvas clearly meant to emphasize Hans's giant proportions. With his head and feet nearly reaching the frame, it creates the impression that with his large size he is exceeding the confined space in which he has been placed.

40 TLMF, FB 2119, fol. 235v (1656); and TLMF, FB 2677, fol. 325v (1703). The portrait was also recorded in the inventories from 1656 and 1703. In 1882 the portrait with the paintings of other "human curiosities" was in the high castle (corridor on the first floor); Ilg and Boenheim, "Das k. k. Schloß Ambras," 45.

41 Discussed by Ravenscroft in chapter 7 of this volume.

During the course of the seventeenth century (the county of Tyrol was ruled by Ferdinand's Habsburg successors until 1665), the portrait of another Bavarian giant, Hans Schnitzer, was added to the Schloss Ambras collection. Measuring about 2.28 meters (or almost 7.5 feet) tall, Schnitzer was from the town of Sonthofen im Allgäu (Bavaria) and was portrayed in 1641 at the age of 28, as the inscription on the upper left portion of the painting of his portrait states.<sup>42</sup> The oversized canvas (2.60 meters high) repeats the conventional posture, showing the giant standing in full-length mode, one arm akimbo with the hand partially hidden, the other very large hand resting on the surface of the accompanying pedestal or table. Unlike Hans Kraus, who was garbed in rather rustic clothing, Schnitzer wears more elegant garments, a golden doublet and ruffled collar, and with the hilt of the rapier visible at his side. The fact that the painting was sent to Innsbruck even after Ferdinand's death testifies to his successors' continued passion for collecting portraits of these unusual human specimens.

## Dwarfs at the Tyrolean Courts

The oldest known sources on dwarfs at the Innsbruck courts date from the time of Archduke Sigmund, where they joined the giant Niklas Haidl as well as several fools in the archduke's residence. In the government account book for the year 1477 there are two entries under expenditures for new clothing for the court dwarf, although the dwarf's name is not noted.<sup>43</sup> In 1501, another dwarf, although likewise not mentioned by name, is documented in the household of Bianca Maria Sforza (1472–1510), the second wife of Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519), who was then residing at the Hofburg in Innsbruck.<sup>44</sup>

42 The inscription reads: "Hans Schnitzer von / Sunthofen im Allgay / seines alters 28iar / ANO 1641" (Hans Schnitzer from Sonthofen im Allgäu, 28 years old, Anno 1641). The portrait (260 × 151 cm) was transferred to the Hofburg at some time in 1924, where it was exhibited together with the portrait of Hans Kraus until it was returned to Schloss Ambras; Gruber, "Zur Geschichte des Innsbrucker Riesenskelettes," 958. The portrait is today housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum (KHM, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 8298). On the portrait and Schnitzer, see Rabanser, "Plaz, Plaz," 260–62 and "Largo, Largo," 260–62; Gamber and Beaufort-Spontin, "Curiositäten," 49; Gruber, "Zur Geschichte des Innsbrucker Riesenskelettes," 958; Luchner, "Schloss Ambras für Mediziner," 62; and Seipel, "Die Entdeckung der Natur," 150.

43 TLA, KKB Raitbuch 1477, vol. 11, fol. 269r, 270r.

44 TLA, Kunstsachen I/534 (May 14, 1501). See also Unterholzner, "Bianca Maria Sforza," 221; Weiss, "Die vergessene Kaiserin," 155. Bianca Maria was the daughter of Galeazzo Maria Sforza who ruled as duke of Milan 1466–76.

Much more is known about the dwarfs in Ferdinand II's court at Schloss Ambras, the aforementioned Thome[r]le (approx. 1562–before 1598) being the most famous.<sup>45</sup> According to information contained in the 1628 inventory, Thome[r]le was around 60–70 centimeters (less than two feet) tall and was depicted in three portraits once displayed in the *Kunstkammer*. One portrait portrays him as a youth, with the second showing him with the giant Anton Fran[c]k in the double portrait (see again figure 11.7).<sup>46</sup> A third painting, executed between 1560 and 1580 by the Italian artist Francesco Terzio (or an artist in his circle), depicts Thome[r]le dressed in full armor (see figure 8.5).<sup>47</sup> Not only does the helmet look too big for the dwarf, but the oversized red and white plumes on his helmet also lend him a comical air, despite (or because of) the gold chain and medallion that suggests his affiliation with a chivalric order.<sup>48</sup> Thome[r]le's armor is assumed to be that adorning the wooden figure and displayed next to Bona's (on the right) in the *Rüstkammer* at Schloss Ambras (see again figure 5.5).<sup>49</sup> He is also thought to be the dwarf whose image appears on the facade of a house in Innsbruck (figure 5.7).<sup>50</sup> Notably, although Thome[r]le resided in the court at Schloss Ambras, the house which allegedly served as his place of residence is in the immediate vicinity of the house built for the giant Niklas Haidl by Archduke Sigmund, close to the Hofburg in Innsbruck.

Thome[r]le became especially famous for his appearance at an entertainment staged on the occasion of the wedding of Ferdinand's nephew Wilhelm V and Renata of Lorraine (1544–1602) held in the Munich residence in 1568. The dwarf had been sent to Munich by Ferdinand for the occasion, another example of the free exchange between the courts not only of portraits but also of their living subjects themselves. A detailed description of the event was contained in the *Dialoghi* of the composer and poet Massimo Troiano (published in Venice in 1569). According to this account, during the banquet Thome[r]le jumped out of a pie and greeted the bride and groom and their

45 Luchner, "Schloss Ambras für Mediziner," 63; and Seipel, "Wir sind Helden," 151–154.

46 TLMF, FB 2678, fol. 147v (1680); and TLMF, FB 2677, fol. 324v (1703).

47 On the portrait (100 × 76 cm), see Kuster, "Kleiner Mann – ganz groß," 178; and Rabanser, "Plaz, Plaz," 266–70, and "Largo, Largo," 266–70.

48 The portrait is treated in chapter 8 below.

49 Thome[r]le's wooden mannequin was restored in 1620. See TLA, KKB, Raitbuch 1620, vol. 156, fol. 499v; TLA, Inventar 40/10, fol. 147v (1603); and TLA, Inventar 40/17, [without fol.] (1628). See also Luchner, "Denkmal eines Renaissancefürsten," 23–4 and illustration 22.

50 The fresco on the building located at Stiftsgasse 2 was restored in 1905 by the painter Ludwig Sturm; see Felmayer, "Die profanen Kunstdenkmäler," 296–97; and Hammer, "Die Paläste," 60–61.



Figure 5.7 Anonymous, Imagined portrait of the court dwarf Thome[r]le on the facade of a house, Stiftsgasse 2, Innsbruck. Photo: Hansjörg Rabanser.

guests.<sup>51</sup> His legendary performance seems to have prompted the Munich court to subsequently order portraits of Thome[r]le, four of which were in the *Kunstkammer* there (although they are now considered lost). Since Thome[r]le was represented at different ages and was also shown in armor, the paintings are likely to have been reproductions of those in the Schloss Ambras collection. In all probability, the Munich court had ordered the pictures in Innsbruck, possibly in 1583 when records show that 12 guilders were paid in Munich for a “portrait of the dwarf Tomerlen” (*conterfet des Tomerlen Zwerger*).<sup>52</sup>

Another dwarf’s portrait in Ferdinand’s collection at Schloss Ambras was that of Peter Oberanter, identified as *Petter Zwerg* (Dwarf Peter) according

51 Troiano, *Dialoghi*, fol. 81v. See also Baader, “Der bayerische Renaissancehof,” 43; Haag, “Fürstlich Tafeln,” 82–3; Leuchtmann, “Die Münchner Fürstenhochzeit,” 179; and Seemann, “Hofzwerg,” 342–53. On dwarfs and giants at festivities, see Kuster, “Kleiner Mann – ganz groß,” 177–78; Seemann, “Hofzwerg,” 299–380; and Scheicher, “Höfische Feste,” 84–85.

52 On the portraits of Thome[r]le in the Munich *Kunstkammer*, see Diemer, Bujok and Diemer, “Johann Baptist Fickler,” 205, 220; and Sauerländer, “Die Münchner Kunstkammer,” 2:871, 1024.



Figure 5.8 Anonymous, *Portrait of the Dwarf Peter Oberanter*, ca. 1576. Oil on panel, 11.5 × 9.5 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, picture gallery inv. 5423 © KHM-Museumsverband.

to the inscription on the panel, painted in 1576 (figure 5.8). Although there are no records to show that he was actually affiliated with the archducal court, Peter seems to have stayed at the court in Munich at some point, since a portrait of him is documented in the *Kunstskammer* there.<sup>53</sup> At Schloss Ambras Peter's tiny portrait (measuring only 11.5 centimeters or 4.5 inches tall) was part of a collection of small pictures of famous or extraordinary people that the archduke had begun collecting around 1576. Unlike the full-length portraits of the giants and even Thome[r]le, Peter Zwerg has been shown in three-quarter bust view. Although the anonymous artist has made no attempt to disguise his facial imperfections—his beardless face is conspicuously wrinkled—he is dressed in rich clothing with a fur-trimmed outer garment. Like Thome[r]le, Peter has also been equipped with

53 On Oberanter and other dwarfs at the Munich court, see Baader, "Der bayerische Renaissancehof," 83–85; Diemer, Bujok and Diemer, "Johann Baptist Fickler," 220; Kenner, "Die Porträtsammlung," 255–56; Sauerländer, "Die Münchner Kunstskammer," 2:1025; and Seipel, "Werke für die Ewigkeit," 87, 90.



a gold chain and medallion, an accouterment that suggests he held some importance in one of the courts, perhaps that of Munich.

Another small portrait in Ferdinand's series of miniatures was of a Polish dwarf ironically referred to as *Der gros Polac* (The great Pole).<sup>54</sup> He can likely be identified as the dwarf Gregor Brafskofski, originally from Poland but who resided at the court in Munich, where the portrait is also listed in the inventory of the *Kunstammer* there.<sup>55</sup> The dwarf was allegedly presented as a gift from Ferdinand's sister Catherine of Austria (1533–1572) to her brother-in-law Albrecht V. (Catherine's marriage to Sigmund II Augustus of Poland (1520–1572) put her in good position to procure dwarfs from that country which supplied many courts in Europe with Polish dwarfs.<sup>56</sup>) The small panel, which shows only the dwarf's head, offers a close-up view of his facial features. His face is pressed up to the imaginary window that comprises the picture plane and his hat is cut off at the top of the panel where the inscription identifies him as "Der Gros Polak". The fact that no name was assigned to his painting in the Ambras inventory from 1656 indicates that knowledge of the dwarf's precise identity had been lost over time, which is why the records refer to him simply as a *Tortern* (Tartare), presumably based upon his apparent Polish origins.<sup>57</sup>

Other dwarfs have been recorded in the court of Ferdinand II, some of whom, like the Polish dwarfs, were procured from other territories. An Italian dwarf named Magnifico, who had previously served Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo (1512–1578) in Rome, was sent to Ferdinand by the archduke's equerry Kaspar von Wolkenstein the Elder (1529–1605) after the cardinal's death in 1578. The account indicates that the dwarf traveled from Rome to Trento in a basket mounted on the back of a pack animal.<sup>58</sup> According to the description, Magnifico was eighteen years old, but had the physique of an eighty-year-old man with a hunched back; he had an alert mind but needed a helper to take care of him.<sup>59</sup> In 1585 a lackey also brought three dwarfs from Poland to Innsbruck, which Anna von Wolkenstein (probably

54 On Brafskofski, see Kenner, "Die Porträtsammlung," 254–55; Rabanser, "Plaz, Plaz," 274–76 and "Largo, Largo," 274–76; Rauch, "Elisabeth," 267; and Sauerländer, "Die Münchner Kunstammer," 2:1023. The portrait measures only 13.5 × 9.6 cm.

55 Diemer, Bujok, and Diemer, "Johann Baptist Fickler," 220; and Sauerländer, "Die Münchner Kunstammer," 2:1023.

56 See the Introduction to this volume.

57 TLMF, FB 2119, fol. 236r (1656). An ethnic group of Tatars was associated with Poland.

58 The writer uses the expression "auf einem säm in einem korb," with *säm* here referring to the pack animals (*Saumtiere*) that carried baskets and goods across the Alps.

59 Magnifico was "achtzehn jahre alt, doch mit krümpe des ruggens und der gebein, auch spitzfindigkeit des hirns ein achtzigjähriger und sonst zarter complexion, braucht einen eigenen

a sister of Kaspar von Wolkenstein) then sent to Ferdinand, evidently at his request. In a postscript to her letter to the archduke, she noted that the dwarf would still grow, which suggests that the dwarf was still a child.<sup>60</sup> In 1596, a year after Ferdinand's death and in an apparent attempt to reduce the size of her court, his second wife Anna Caterina Gonzaga (1566–1621), sent a dwarf to Emperor Rudolf II (1552–1612), who was reportedly very pleased with his gift.<sup>61</sup>

Although the court's records do not always provide the dwarfs' given names, some of these unnamed individuals may be among the portraits of seven dwarfs listed in the inventory of the Schloss Ambras *Kunstkammer* from 1621.<sup>62</sup> In addition to the three portraits of Thome[r]le already mentioned, four other paintings depicted two female dwarfs, another unnamed dwarf, and a male dwarf referred to as Mathias. The portrait of an unidentified dwarf painted around 1600, which was long wrongly regarded as a possible portrait of Thome[r]le, could represent one of the latter two dwarfs.<sup>63</sup> This dwarf, who sports a reddish goatee, is shown in full-length mode, one arm akimbo, the other supporting the sword placed prominently at his side, balanced upright and shown in its entirety rather than just the hilt visible at his hip. He is dressed in black with a white ruff and a gold chain draped across his chest, aspects which, in addition to his sword, conferred a more noble bearing upon him. As with the portrait of Thome[r]le, this dwarf, too, has been placed in a darkened interior, his figure offset by a lavish (green) drapery swag, which lends a more dramatic air to his presentation.

After Ferdinand's death in 1595, his nephew Archduke Leopold V (1586–1632) continued the familial tradition at the court in the Hofburg where he resided with his wife Claudia de' Medici (1604–1648).<sup>64</sup> Two of the dwarfs in residence were the 22-year-old Michael Buster and his 28-year-old sister, both about 80 centimeters (about 31.5 inches) tall. Their portraits—predictably—gained the attention of Philip Hainhofer, who saw them in the Hofburg palace during his visit to the court of Archduke

menschen zur wart, ist füsierlich und pägschiererisch"; quoted in Hirn, "Erzherzog Ferdinand II," 467.

60 Ibid., 468.

61 Taddei, "Anna Caterina Gonzaga," 76.

62 Scheicher, "Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern," 134–35.

63 On the portrait (120 × 80 cm), now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, see illustration and discussion in Rabanser, "Plaz, Plaz," 271 (fig. 115); "Largo, Largo," 271 (fig. 115); and Seipel, "Die Entdeckung der Natur," 148–49.

64 Claudia de' Medici, member of the powerful dynasty in Florence, is discussed in chapter 11 below.

Leopold V in Innsbruck in 1628 (the same time he viewed the *Kunstkammer* at Schloss Ambras). At some point later in the century, these dwarfs' portraits were moved from the Hofburg to Schloss Ambras, where they were added to the already sizeable collection that Ferdinand had begun assembling during his lifetime.<sup>65</sup> Fittingly, giving the importance accorded giants and dwarfs by the Habsburg rulers, the portraits of these "living marvels" in the *Kunstkammer* joined the dynastic portraits, including that of Emperor Ferdinand II (1578–1637) with his court dwarf painted by Joseph Heintz the Elder in 1604.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

As in other ruling houses in early modern Europe, the courts of the Tyrolean branch of the Habsburgs pursued a passion for collecting and successively built up richly endowed collections of art and curiosities. Such collections were investments and symbols of prestige, which testified to the political, and above all, financial power of the ruler. They also served as evidence of his intellect and thirst for knowledge, and were a visible sign of his taste for the exotic. Within these *Kunst- und Wunderkammern*, the appearance of giants and dwarfs, some of whom were real and could be admired and presented as living "showpieces," formed a very special aspect. Archduke Ferdinand II was not the first dynastic ruler to respond to the princely vogue for *Kunstkammern*, but he distinguished himself by pursuing his passion with exceptional drive and determination. The corpus of portraits of giants and dwarfs exhibited in Schloss Ambras lent his collection an air of exclusivity that was rarely matched by his peers.

Paradoxically, although contemporary accounts and court records have aided in identifying the giants, and to a lesser extent the dwarfs represented in these portraits, for the most part the artists have remained anonymous.<sup>67</sup>

65 The paintings were listed in the castle inventory from 1703; TLMF, FB 2677, fol. 322v, 323r (1703). Michael Buster (given here as 24 years old) and his sister are also mentioned in Happel, "Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt," 237.

66 The portrait is today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna; see discussion by Heinz and Schütz, "Porträtgalerie," 123–24.

67 Information gleaned from archival documents, inventory entries, anecdotal accounts, and notes enclosed with the portraits or preserved with them provides us with the names of the giants and dwarfs, but few details about their personal lives have emerged. Aside from the best-known individuals (the giants Niklas Haidl, Bartolomeo Bona, and Anton Fran[c]k, and

This does much to suggest that Ferdinand and his courtly peers were not as concerned with having great works of art as they were in having visual documentation of the giants' and dwarfs' rare physical properties. The fact that these portraits of unusual human beings were exhibited as collectors' items may have been why the Parisian doctor Charles Patin (1633–1693), who visited Schloss Ambras in the seventeenth century, felt compelled to comment on their repulsive appearance, a view certainly not shared by the Tyrolean rulers.<sup>68</sup>

As for the manner of presentation, with few exceptions the giants and dwarfs in the portraits do not appear with other figures, nor were they used in the service of sophisticated iconographical schemes; instead, they are typically shown in sparse interiors which focused attention on their remarkable bodily construction. Often scaled to the giants' and dwarfs' actual size, these portraits brought to life the unusual individuals who may not have resided in the Tyrolean courts, but who with their painted images would have always been on hand for Archduke Ferdinand and his guests—and subsequent visitors viewing his unique collection. The lively interactions between ruling houses, which lent the court's giants and dwarfs for special occasions, exchanged paintings, and sent copies of the works in their collections, speaks to a shared taste among these early modern princes and the Habsburg dynasty. Particularly in the case of dwarfs and their painted images, this preference was to be carried forward with the Spanish branch of the Habsburgs in Madrid, where these “living marvels” and their portraits became a notable feature of the royal court.<sup>69</sup>

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the dwarf Thome[r]le), for the most part there is no indication of where they were from, whether they had families, whether they were in court service elsewhere, or if so, what duties may have been assigned to them within those courts.

68 Patin, “Relations historiques,” 68.

69 Discussed in chapter 7 of this volume.

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## 6. A Model Christian and “Child of God”: A German Court Dwarf and His Funeral Sermon

*Eva Seemann*

### Abstract

This essay explores the history of court dwarfs especially in the Holy Roman Empire from a social and religious point of view. It centers around Justus Bertram, a “proportionate” dwarf in the retinue of Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg (1572–1619), who was considered an “ideal miniature” by his contemporaries. His case is noteworthy because of a lengthy funeral sermon the elector commissioned in print after his death. While such an honor reflects the personal esteem in which the prince held his favorite, the sermon also provides a religious perspective on dwarfs and a theological justification for their presence at court. In addition, it gives rare insights into the social background of a dwarf at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

**Keywords:** proportionate dwarfism, Justus Bertram, Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg, Johann Tramm, Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg, funeral sermons

As elsewhere in Europe, the popularity of court dwarfs was a widespread phenomenon among German princes of the early modern period. From the late Middle Ages until well into the eighteenth century, princes and nobles from all territories of the Holy Roman Empire surrounded themselves with dwarfs as court wonders, entertainers, and symbols of princely status. Due to the high number of courts, large and small, in the politically fragmented empire of the German nation, it can be estimated that the number of dwarfs reached at least several hundred. Many of these dwarfs can be identified in

court accounts and household lists, in financial records and letters; others are represented in literature and portraiture.<sup>1</sup> Among the earliest mentions of dwarfs at German courts are records from the territories of Hesse and Saxony dating from the fourteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In the fifteenth century, court dwarfs began to appear in the records of most of the greater courts as well as several small and middle-sized courts, both secular and ecclesiastic.<sup>3</sup> In Vienna, Prague, Munich, Dresden, and Stuttgart, among others, the so-called “chamber dwarf” became institutionalized as an official position during the sixteenth century. In these courts, dwarfs usually lived and served in close proximity to the family of the ruler, received lodging, food, clothes, and other necessities from the palace administration and were often provided with wages on a regular basis.<sup>4</sup> In addition, dwarfs, male and female, usually had their own servants, the so-called *Zwergendiener* or *Zwergendienerinnen*, who were of normal stature and reliably appear in records and household lists.<sup>5</sup>

While the presence of dwarfs at European courts has long been known, it is only in recent years that the ambiguous status of these court denizens has received intensified research interest. Scholars from different fields have investigated the ambiguous meanings of the dwarf body in early modern discourses of difference, deformity, and monstrosity, the place of dwarfs within court imagery and protocol, and their striking roles as entertainers

1 The life and history of dwarfs in German courts (based on about 250 individuals) is treated extensively in my book, which focuses on the courts of Vienna, Dresden, Stuttgart, and Munich, as well as several smaller courts, between ca. 1550 and 1750; see Seemann, *Hofzwerg*. For general methodological considerations, see also Seemann, “Der kleine Unterschied.” Pictorial evidence of German court dwarfs can be found in Tietze-Conrat, *Dwarfs and Jesters in Art*; Enderle, Meyerhöfer, and Unverfehrt, *Small People – Great Art*; and Enderle and Meyerhöfer, *Kleinwuchs*. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German texts are mine. I thank Robin O’Byrne and Adrina Schulz for their comments on this chapter, and Thomas Fischbacher, Marna Schneider and Diana Stört for sharing material on the case.

2 A court account by Margrave Wilhelm I of Meissen (1343–1407) from 1386 mentions a *Johannes gnanus*; Ermisch, “Hofhaltungsrechnung,” 24. Likewise, the Hessian servant book records one *Meister Johann das Getwerg* (Master John the dwarf) in the service of Landgrave Hermann II in a record for May 18, 1378; Gundlach, *Dienerbuch*, 119.

3 For an overview of the presence of dwarfs at German courts, see Seemann, *Hofzwerg*, 19–26.

4 Unlike in other European courts, dwarfs regularly appear in household lists with the title *Zwerg* or *Kammerzwerg*.

5 In 1683, for example, the imperial court in Vienna employed at least seven servants for the dwarfs and just as many chamber dwarfs: three in the household of Emperor Leopold I, two with his wife, Empress Eleonore Magdalene of Palatinate-Neuburg, and two in the household of the widowed Empress Eleonore of Gonzaga the Younger; see Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv Wien, HZAB 127 (1683), 167v–168r, 222r.

and symbols of princely status.<sup>6</sup> However, less attention has so far been paid to their integration into court life, their social background and families, as well as to theological discourses surrounding dwarfs, which is in part due to the general scarcity and dispersal of written material. This especially applies to the German-speaking courts, where the complex social positions of dwarfs have only rarely become the object of individual study.<sup>7</sup>

The case of the Brandenburg court dwarf discussed in this chapter offers a new social and religious perspective on the topic. Dwarfs are documented at the Brandenburg court from the late sixteenth into the early eighteenth century, but we have by far the most biographical information about Justus Bertram, a dwarf in the retinue of Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg (1572–1619) from the House of Hohenzollern.<sup>8</sup> This popularity was partly due to his physical beauty and proportion, represented in a famous and now lost wooden statue in the princely collections, and partly to the circumstances of his death in 1619.<sup>9</sup> Bertram died unexpectedly at the age of fourteen on a journey to Gdansk, after which his body was brought to Berlin and buried with a public ceremony in the crypt of the Stiftskirche, the main church of the Hohenzollern residence.<sup>10</sup> Johann Sigismund personally attended the funeral with his wife Anna of Prussia, both reportedly devastated at the death of the dwarf. Paying tribute to their cherished companion the

6 For studies on dwarfs in the Italian and/or Spanish courts, see, in particular, O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight" and "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf"; Woods-Marsden, "Vision of Dwarfs"; Ghadessi, *Portraits*; and Ravenscroft, "Invisible Friends" and "Dwarfs."

7 Aside from numerous scattered sources concerning single court dwarfs, there is, prior to my research, no comprehensive study of the phenomenon. For an overview of dwarfs in Tyrol and their presence in Ambras, see Rabanser, "Plaz, Plaz," 265–79 and his chapter 5 of this volume. The only extensive case study of a German-speaking dwarf is from Bauer from 1989, which deals with the Salzburg court dwarf Johann Franz von Meichelböck; "Johann Franz von Meichelböck." See also his study (together with Heinz Verföndern) on dwarf caricatures in early modern print culture, *Barocke Zwergenkarikaturen*.

8 Most notable are the dwarfs in the household of Johann Sigismund's mother Catherine of Brandenburg-Küstrin (1549–1602), who is said to have organized a dwarf wedding. See the later account by the Hanoverian envoy to Russia Friedrich Christian Weber, who describes Catherine's dwarfs on the occasion of another dwarf wedding held in Russia in 1710; Weber, *Das veränderte Rußland*, 231. Archival documents from Catherine's reign are scarce and only mention a female dwarf also named Catherine; see the annual accounts for the expenditures of the *Hofrentei* from 1602, Geheimes Staatsarchiv (hereafter: GStA) Berlin, I. HA Geheimer Rat, Rep. 36, No. 326, expenditures for the bookbinder from November 6. This is the same dwarf referenced in n. 54 below. As far as we know, Justus Bertram was the only court dwarf in the retinue of Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund.

9 The statue was first exhibited in the Berlin *Rüstkammer* and later in the *Kunstkammer*, where it was presented to the public and described in several accounts of visitors; see Schneider and Stört, "Wooden Statues of Justus Bertram."

10 Both the tomb and the church were demolished in 1747.



Figure 6.1 Title page from the funeral sermon dedicated to the court dwarf Justus Bertram, Martin Füssel, *Klugheit der Kinder Gottes*, Berlin, 1619. Artwork in public domain.

princely couple commissioned a funeral sermon by the Brandenburg court preacher Martin Füssel.<sup>11</sup> The 39-page sermon, entitled *Klugheit der Kinder Gottes* (Wisdom of the Children of God), appeared in print within the same year of the ceremony (figure 6.1).

This funeral sermon is a singular and remarkable document, for many reasons. The costly publication of a sermon was an honor usually reserved for

11 The court preacher's biography is given in von Thadden, *Hofprediger*, 172–74.

the upper echelons of Protestant society, which thus indicates the personal esteem in which the elector and electress held their servant, as well as the high status of the court dwarf.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, while other court dwarfs seem to have received similarly elaborate funerals, printed funeral sermons were a marked exception.<sup>13</sup> Only two other known printed sermons exist for German court dwarfs, dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century and referring to Justus Bertram's sermon in several ways.<sup>14</sup> The sermon for Bertram consists of a theological and a biographical part, fully in accord with the requirements of the genre. It begins with an epitaph to the deceased, continues with the exegesis of a biblical passage, and concludes by recounting the life of the deceased.<sup>15</sup> While reflecting on the circumstances of the dwarf's sudden death, the court preacher sought to turn loss into comfort and grief into hope, and presented Bertram in three different but equally idealized ways: first as a creature of God, a perfect court wonder and a natural source of admiration; second as an exemplary Christian in the face of death; and third as a poor peasant boy and son who had found a safe haven at court. By analyzing these narratives and the different layers of

12 Due to high printing costs, many sermons given at funerals never appeared in print. The online catalogue of German funeral sermons (GESA) lists a total of thirteen printed funeral sermons by Martin (or Martinus) Füssel; see *Gesamtkatalog deutschsprachiger Leichenpredigten*. These include sermons for the Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund, who died shortly after his dwarf, as well as for two privy councilors of the Brandenburg court and two wives of court physicians. See Müller and Küster, *Altes und Neues Berlin*, 1:140–42 for a list of his (other) works and publications. Numerous similar printed sermons are known from other court preachers of the period.

13 In 1686, the thirteen-year-old female court dwarf Wiebgen Huß was buried in the Dresden Frauenkirche with an impressive funeral ceremony that included a procession with torchlights and the ringing of bells; Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, Oberhofmarschallamt C, No. 33:65.

14 The first printed funeral sermon, composed in 1710, was dedicated to the court dwarf Johann Tramm, who was in the service of Christiane Eberhardine of Brandenburg-Bayreuth (1671–1727), a descendant of a side branch of the Hohenzollern dynasty who became electress of Saxony and queen consort of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth with her marriage to Augustus II the Strong. The second sermon, from 1714, was dedicated to the court dwarf Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg, who was in the service of Christiane Eberhardine's brother Georg Wilhelm of Brandenburg-Bayreuth (1678–1726). See Steinbrecher, *Das durch GOTTes Wunder-Hand*, and Stübner, *Wie Ungewißheit der Menschen Todtes-Stunde*. Both dwarfs are discussed further in this chapter.

15 Apart from the sermon in a stricter sense, printed funeral sermons as they emerged in Lutheran Germany in the mid-sixteenth century usually contained ample biographical information about the deceased and tried to convey general Christian principles. As such, they are a rich source for prosopographical studies and for understanding the Protestant *ars moriendi*. On early modern funeral sermons in general, see Leppin, "Preparing for Death," and Moore, *Patterned Lives*.



meaning in the sermon, this chapter explores the ways in which a German court preacher depicted the life and status of a court dwarf and, in doing so, not only made sense of dwarfism as a physical variety but also seemed to be giving a theological justification for the presence of dwarfs at court.

## I. The Court Wonder

Justus Bertram was born on January 2, 1604 in “Rillichhausen” in the duchy of Brunswick. He was the son of peasants and had four siblings, including one sister who was also a dwarf.<sup>16</sup> According to the sermon, Justus Bertram came into the care of the nobleman Antonius von Alten at the age of seven and spent almost three years in the service of Frederick Ulrich, duke of Brunswick and Lüneburg (1591–1634), before he joined the retinue of Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund at the age of ten.<sup>17</sup> At the Brandenburg court, he served in the inner chambers of the princely household in close physical proximity to the person of the ruler. Füssel’s sermon frequently describes him as *Kammerknabe* (chamber page), a typical position for most German court dwarfs, who often held the title of page or valet, or if female, lady-in-waiting.<sup>18</sup> In this position, Füssel tells us, “[he] waited four and a half years: To your Lordship’s good pleasure, and great delight that he has taken from this little creature and creation of God.”<sup>19</sup>

The mention of “pleasure” and “delight” is noteworthy and points to how the early modern courtly audience typically responded to dwarfs. For Füssel and most of his contemporaries, dwarfs formed part of the wonders of the natural world; they were marveled at as testimonies of God’s playfulness and ingenuity and valued at court not only for their rarity and elusiveness

16 Füssel, *Klugheit*, 14v. It is most likely the village of Röllinghausen, which was under the jurisdiction of the dukes of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, and today belongs to the city of Alfeld (Leine) in the state of Lower Saxony. His father also had three daughters from his first marriage, but, as Füssel points out, they were all “in their right stature and length.” *Ibid.*, 14r-v.

17 Johann Sigismund was Frederik Ulrich’s father-in-law. In 1614, Frederik Ulrich married the elector’s daughter Anna Sophia (1598–1659).

18 For example, at the Habsburg court in Vienna, court dwarfs usually held the title of *Kammerzwerger* or *Kammerzwergerin* (chamber dwarf), which appears in official court records and was used by the court dwarfs themselves in their correspondence. At the Brandenburg court around 1700, dwarfs were still listed among the pages, i.e., young nobles serving the prince; see the household list of Frederik III in GStA Berlin, I. HA Geheimer Rat, Rep. 36, no. 60.

19 Füssel, *Klugheit*, 16v: “vnd hat in die vierdtehalb Jahr auffgewartet: Zu Ihrer Churf. Gn. guter gnüge, vnnd sonderer ergötzlichkeit die sie an dieser kleinen Creatur vnd Geschöpff Gottes getragen haben.”

but also for their unusual physical appearance.<sup>20</sup> Yet whereas many of his contemporaries were concerned with questions of marvelous dwarf races (like pygmies), or the potential natural causes of dwarfism, Füssel adopted a clear theological perspective. He stated that dwarfs were none other than the immediate expression of God's creation and will. "Even small people," he emphasized in his sermon, "whom we call dwarfs, are God's creatures. He created not only the great giants, but also the little dwarfs. He made both the small and the great, and cares for them all ... and as he made us, so must we be."<sup>21</sup> For Füssel, dwarfs were living examples of the wonderful variety of God's creation, an argument that can be traced back to Augustine, who believed that the entire natural world, including "wonders of nature," were an expression of God's will and omnipotence. In this classical Christian line of thought, to marvel at dwarfs was a matter of belief; as this admiration was ultimately a reflection of the admiration of God, to question the cause of their existence would have meant to question their Creator.<sup>22</sup>

But it was not his small size alone that made Justus Bertram the object of delighted astonishment and admiration. Bertram, whom Füssel frequently describes as a *Jüngling* (young man) and *Knabe* (boy), represented the particularly rare and precious type of the proportionate dwarf, who became the epitome of an ideal court dwarf in the early modern period.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he seems to have been of a particular beauty: "He [Bertram] was very beautiful," reads the description by a contemporary, "without having any wrinkles on his face; the limbs of his body were very well-formed and shapely, which is rare in such dwarfs."<sup>24</sup> In 1721, the author of the general dictionary *Allgemeines Lexicon der Künste und Wissenschaften*, defined "dwarf" as someone "who

20 See Woods-Marsden, "Vision of Dwarfs," 334 ff, and O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight," 256. For more general early modern conceptions of "wonders," see Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 101–8, 190–201.

21 Füssel, *Klugheit*, 15r: "Nu sind auch kleine Menschen, die wir Zwerge nennen, Gottes Geschöpf. Er hat nicht allein die grossen Riesen, sondern auch die kleinen Zwerglin erschaffen. Er hat beyde die kleinen vnd die grossen gemacht, vns sorget für alle gleich ... vnd wie er vns gemacht hat, so müssen wir sein."

22 For this classical Augustinian viewpoint, see Wind, *Foul and Pestilent Congregation*, 7 ff; and Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 39–48. Accordingly, Füssel states: "Du liebest alles das da ist, vnd hassest nichts was du gemacht hast, denn du hast freylich nichts bereitet, da du haß zu hettest. Wie könt etwas bleiben, wenn du nicht woltest, oder wie kundt erhalten werden, das du nicht geruffen hettest." (You love everything that is there, and hate nothing that you have made, for you have certainly not made anything that you hate. How could anything remain if you did not want it, or how could it be preserved if you did not call for it?); *Klugheit*, 15r.

23 Ibid., 3r, 5r. The terms are ambiguous because they both refer to Bertram's young age.

24 "War sehr schön, ohne daß er etzliche Runtzeln im Gesicht hatte; Die Glieder des Leibes waren gar förmlich und wohlgestalt, welches doch bey solchen Zwergen seltsam"; Praetorius,

does not attain the usual size of the body, but remains excessively small far below it," adding, "Most of such people also have a special deformity, that they are big-headed, or hunchbacked, or bow-legged: but those who have skillful and well-proportioned limbs in their small stature are considered of higher value and are brought to the courts of great lords for pleasure."<sup>25</sup>

Although there was a marked preference for proportionate dwarfs, disproportionate dwarfs were also to be found in early modern German courts. However, contemporaries clearly differentiated between different types of dwarfism, which evoked different reactions in terms of aesthetical responses and which were assigned different cultural meanings.<sup>26</sup> While disproportionate dwarfs were associated with deformity and often depicted in art and literature as ugly, ridiculous, or grotesque, characteristics that more easily qualified them for the role of fool and jester, proportionate dwarfs generally appeared in a much more favorable light.<sup>27</sup> The latter corresponded to classical notions of harmony and beauty and the widespread belief that physical beauty reflected the inner beauty of the soul.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, proportionate dwarfs more clearly resembled children and were therefore susceptible to being viewed as "childlike" and not threatening, and of being treated like (other) children.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, as "ideal miniatures," proportionate dwarfs were part of the contemporary vogue for miniatures, which was reflected in miniature portraits, dollhouses, gardens, and miniature objects of all kinds.<sup>30</sup> The

*Anthropodemos*, 712ff. This description is based on the Latin chronicle by Johannes Cernitius from 1626, *Decem e familia*, 99.

25 The definition in German reads: "Zwerg, Nanus, Pumilio: Nain. Einer der die gewöhnliche leibes-grösse nicht erreicht, sondern weit darunter unmäßig klein bleibet. Die meisten solcher leute haben daneben noch eine besondere mißgestalt, daß sie groß-köpffe, oder höckerig, oder krummbeinig sind: die aber geschickliche und wohlgemäßigte glieder bey ihrer kleinen gestalt haben, werden für andern werth geachtet und zur lust an grosser herren höfe gezogen"; Jablonski, *Allgemeines Lexicon der Künste und Wissenschaften*, 915.

26 See the Introduction to this volume, and Ravenscroft, "Invisible Friends," 29 ff, and for a more thorough discussion of these differentiations in German courts, Seemann, *Hofzwerge*, 97–101.

27 On the meaning of deformity and the status of disproportionate court dwarfs in Renaissance Italy, see O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight."

28 For these notions of beauty and their connection to morals, see Rogers, "Beauty," 128 ff, and Turner, *Disability*, 29 ff.

29 For an analysis of the cultural meaning of "miniature men" based on the "Tom Thumb" motive in literature as well as the representations of the English court dwarf Jeffrey Hudson (who is discussed in the Introduction to this volume), see Vallone, *Big and Small*, 17–74.

30 Ibid. On miniature objects, see also Cremer, "Miniaturisierung als Verdichtung"; and on the miniature as a cultural and aesthetic principle, see Stewart, *On Longing*, 37–69, 111–25.

idea of the miniature as a model reduced in size and a condensation of art and craftsmanship is also an important element in Füßel's funeral sermon. Building on contemporary debates about the art of God and Nature, he likened God to an artist whose skill and perfection was best seen in his smallest works. As Füßel underlined, the smaller the creation, the higher must be the esteem for the creator: "For it is thus planted in [our] nature that we always have more pleasure and satisfaction in the works of great artists, in what is small, subtle, yet perfect in everything, than in what is great, since in the small we see more of the artist's wisdom and skill: Why should we not also, in such a creature of God, with delight of heart, gaze upon his inscrutable wisdom, kindness, power, and glory, and marvel at it?"<sup>31</sup>

Notably, the same argument can be found in the two other funeral sermons for court dwarfs from the beginning of the eighteenth century. The first was dedicated to the Saxon court dwarf Johann Tramm, who died on July 1, 1710 and was also of a proportionate stature. In his sermon, court preacher Gottfried Steinbrecher widely praised him as a "masterpiece of Nature" (*Meisterstück der Natur*) and declared the admiration his physique evoked to be a completely natural reaction.<sup>32</sup> This motif was also repeated in the second sermon, which was composed only four years later, in 1714, by the court preacher Albrecht Stübner for Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg, a dwarf in the retinue of Georg Wilhelm of Brandenburg-Bayreuth (1678–1726), descended from a side branch of the Hohenzollern dynasty.<sup>33</sup> A funeral poem composed by the dwarf's tutor, which was inserted at the end of the sermon, reveled in the rarity and uniqueness of young Georg and likewise attributed his physique to God's ingenuity and the playfulness of Nature: "Such rarity and wonder of nature / (With which few perhaps are to be compared) / Our princely court could show a few days ago; In little Georg Wilhelm the true trace of God's miracle hands (*Wunder-Händen*) could be noticed / [and] how incomparable She [Nature] is in her works."<sup>34</sup>

31 Füßel, *Klugheit*, fol. 17r: "Vnd zwar nicht unbillich: Denn es also in die Natur gepflantz ist, das wir allezeit in grosser Künstler Wercken, an deme mehr lust vnd ergetzlichkeit haben, was klein, subtil, doch in allem vollkommen ist, alß an deme was gar groß ist, Sintemal an dem kleinen deß Künstlers Weißheit vnd geschickligkeit, mehr zu sehen: Warumb solten wir nicht auch in solchem Geschöpff GOTTes, mit lust deß Hertzens, seine vnerforschliche Weißheit, gütigkeit, Macht vnd Herrligkeit anschawen, vnd vns drüber verwundern?"

32 Steinbrecher, *Das durch GOTTes Wunder-Hand*, 1 ff.

33 Stübner, *Wie Ungewißheit der Menschen Todtes-Stunde*, 30–32.

34 "Dergleichen Seltenheit und Wunder der Natur / (Mit welchem wenige vielleicht sind zu vergleichen) / Kont unser Fürsten-Hoff vor wenig Tagen zeigen; Am kleinen Georg Wilhelm ließ sich die wahre Spuhr / Von Gottes Wunder-Händen mercken / Wie unbegreiflich doch Sie sey in ihren Wercken." Ibid., 32.

The taste for the miniature also found vivid expression in the early modern *Kunstkammer*, which assembled miniature objects of all kinds for a courtly and scientific audience. It is therefore no coincidence that portraits of dwarfs often formed an integral part of museums and princely collections.<sup>35</sup> Justus Bertram, too, seems to have been portrayed for the Berlin-Brandenburg collections, although unfortunately all works have been lost. A painting and a statue (*simulacrum ac effigies*) of the court dwarf are first mentioned in a chronicle by the Berlin archivist Johannes Cernitius from 1626.<sup>36</sup> According to a later account, both the painting and the sculpture were publicly displayed among other wondrous and precious items (*admiranda et pretiosa*) in the general collections of the Berlin *Rüstkammer* (armory), but were burned in a fire in 1665 that destroyed a large part of the princely collections.<sup>37</sup> When the *Rüstkammer* was rebuilt in 1670, however, it still displayed two life-size wooden figures of a male and female dwarf in Dutch clothes, which several visitors' accounts identified as representations of Justus Bertram and his sister (or his wife, respectively).<sup>38</sup> From the beginning of the eighteenth until the middle of the nineteenth century, both were exhibited in the newly

35 The best-known examples are those from the *Kunstkammer* of Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol at Schloss Ambras, but portraits and statuettes of court dwarfs can also be found in most other princely *Wunderkammern* or cabinets of curiosities. For the Ambras collection, see Rabanser, "Plaz, Plaz," and chapter 5 of this volume; for other collections, see Seemann, *Hofzwerge*, 46–56.

36 "Habebat enim in deliciis suis Nanum quendam, nomine Justum Bertramum, cujus simulacrum ac effigies hodie adhuc asservatur"; Cernitius, *Decem e familia*, 99.

37 At this time, the *Rüstkammer* and the *Kunst- und Naturalienkammer* were parallel institutions with a similar collection of *artificialia* and *naturalia* of all kinds; see Fischbacher, "Rüst-, Kunst- und Wunderkammern am Hof von Berlin/Cölln," and Stört, "Die 'Churfürstlich Brandenburgische Kunstkammer' vor 1700." The description from the eighteenth century reads: "Ejus statua & simulacrum in aula stabuli Electoralis ad nostra usque tempora asservatum, & et inter alia admiranda & pretiosa aulae conspicuum fuit, cum a superiori anno 1665, dicta aula (Stall-Platz) cum omnibus suis ornamentis & pretiosis, iisque rarissimis & nullo auro vel pretio redimendis ad decem vel plures milliones aestimandis conflagrasset, etiam Justulus factus est Utulus"; Müller and Küster, *Altes und Neues Berlin*, 1:291.

38 Kohlfeldt, in his description of the Berlin *Rüstkammer* from 1694, mentions "Zweene Zwerch nemblich Jost und seine Schwester in lebens größe mit hollendisch Kleidung" (two dwarfs, namely Jost and his sister in life size in Dutch clothes); "Eine akademische Ferienreise," 46. Surprisingly, Müller and Küster in their third volume from 1756 identify the figures as representations of Bertram and his supposed wife; see Müller and Küster, *Altes und Neues Berlin*, 3:19 and 541 ff. This makes it difficult to decide whether the statue survived the fire, whether it had been restored, or whether the statues represented two different dwarfs. The fact that they were wearing Dutch clothes indicates that both were at least modernized to the latest fashion, since Dutch elements held a strong attraction in the Brandenburg court under Elector Frederik Wilhelm (1620–1688), who had a Dutch mother and wife. Later accounts vary considerably concerning the information given about Bertram. They often mixed him up with other accounts of court dwarfs but still helped to preserve his memory into the nineteenth century. For an "object biography" of Justus

arranged *Kunstkammer*, until they seem to have lost their appeal and were removed from the collection.<sup>39</sup>

## II. The Christian

However, Martin Füssel was not only interested in Justus Bertram's status as a court wonder. While the court preacher certainly portrayed him as rare and marvelous in his physical appearance, he was more concerned with his character and the salvation of his soul. Like other authors of funeral sermons, the preacher presented the deceased as an example of a good Christian in life and death. This was in fact a conventional part of the genre. The purpose of the German Protestant funeral sermon was not only to praise and commemorate the deceased but also to convey meaning to the loss of death and to offer comfort, guidance, and moral instruction to the community of the living. For that reason, preachers usually tried to exemplify the deceased individual and to use the case at hand for a general lesson about good Christian duties.<sup>40</sup> The funeral sermon for the Brandenburg court dwarf was no exception. Füssel, like his contemporaries, tried to soften the sorrow of the mourners and the surviving relatives by dwelling on Justus Bertram as a model Christian and a "Child of God."

This was especially important in cases of unexpected death. According to Füssel's detailed account, the court dwarf died suddenly and tragically on July 21, 1619 after falling from a horse. He had followed Johann Sigismund on a journey to the elector's residence in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia). In Gdansk, on the journey back to Berlin, a man approached who wanted to sell Bertram a horse; reluctant at first, after a while he decided to try the horse. Although, as Füssel assures us, the dwarf was otherwise a skilled rider, he fell off the horse, landing on his right temple, and died within a few hours of the incident.<sup>41</sup> In early modern Europe such a sudden and "evil" death was generally considered a bad omen and a potential sign of sin. For a "good" Christian death required time for preparation; dying violently or unexpectedly not only raised questions about the status of the soul of the deceased, but also about immoral or sinful behavior that might

Bertram's representations in the Berlin collections and its different re-evaluations, see Schneider and Stört, "Wooden Statues of Justus Bertram."

39 Both figures are last mentioned in an inventory from 1844; *ibid.*

40 Koslofsky, *Reformation of the Dead*, 107–14.

41 Füssel, *Klugheit*, 5v–6r.

have provoked God's wrath, and could potentially signal bad events to come.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Justus Bertram, this fear actually gained currency when Johann Sigismund, who had never recovered from a stroke he suffered in 1616, died only a few months after his beloved dwarf, on December 23, 1619. "This Elector had a dwarf, who was only two feet high, and was called Justus Bertram, who fell from his little horse a few days [!] before the death of his master, and died," wrote the historian Johann Hübner in 1710, adding "Because he was very well-liked by this Elector, the common man considered it to be a bad sign."<sup>43</sup>

Anticipating similar questions and anxieties, Füßel addressed these issues in two ways. First, he preached at length on the general unpredictability of death, based on an exegesis of James 4:13–14: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow let's go into this city and spend a year there, trade, and make a profit.' Yet you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."<sup>44</sup> The court dwarf was obviously not exempt from this general truth. "In fact," Füßel resumes at the beginning of his sermon, "he experienced that what the apostle reminds us: How uncertain man's life is / That he is / Today red / Tomorrow dead."<sup>45</sup> "For he [the deceased] thought, 'Tomorrow I will be up with my most gracious lord and travel to the Mark': But tomorrow he is dead ... He did not know in the evening that he would be a corpse the next day."<sup>46</sup>

Second, as preachers often did in cases of premature death, Füßel tried to divert any suspicion from Justus Bertram by arguing that his entire life

42 The ideal of a "gentle and blessed death" is especially prevalent in early modern Protestantism and had its origins in the late medieval *ars moriendi* literature; see Kümmel, "Der sanfte und selige Tod." On the treatment of sudden deaths in Protestant funeral literature, see Mohr, *Der unverhoffte Tod*, and Kästner, "Unverhoffte Todesfälle."

43 "Es hatte dieser Churfürst einen Zwerg, der nur zwey Schuch hoch war, und Justus Bertram genennet wurde, der fiel wenig Tage [!] vor dem Tode seines Herrn von seinem kleinen Pferde, und starb: Weil er nun bey diesem Churfürsten ungemein wohl gelitten war, so hielt es zum wenigsten der gemeine Mann vor ein böses Zeichen"; Hübner, *Kurtze Fragen*, 6:686 ff.

44 Füßel, *Klugheit*, 2v.

45 "Sintemal er darin in der That erfahren, daß, was vns der Apostel hier erinnert: Wie gar vngewiß deß Menschen Leben sey / Das er ist / Heute Roth / Morgen Todt"; *ibid.*, 3r.

46 "Denn er dachte: Morgen wil ich auff sein, mit meinem gnädigsten Herren, vnd in die Mark reisen: Aber Morgen ist er tod't ... Er wuste den Abend nicht, das er Morgen eine Leiche sein solte"; *ibid.*, 5v–6r. Similar quotations from the Bible were used in other cases of unexpected death; see Mohr, *Der unverhoffte Tod*, 11. Likewise, in his funeral sermon for Johann Sigismund, the court preacher Johann Bergius used another proverb derived from the apocryphal Book of Sirach (10:10): "Heute Koenig / morgen tod't" (Today's King will die tomorrow); see Wischmeyer, "Hofprediger," 155.

had been blessed by the love and grace of God.<sup>47</sup> According to Füssel, God had not only created the dwarf, but had loved him and cared for him until his death, for "God never abandons one of his creatures."<sup>48</sup> God showed his love physically, by giving Bertram into the care of a good lord and prince, and spiritually, by providing him with a good and sincere heart.<sup>49</sup> Although the preacher expressed some concern about whether Bertram's faith might have been compromised by his early contact with court life, he saw sufficient signs of the dwarf's piety.<sup>50</sup> Not only had he always avoided any form of gossip and slander, but he had always treated his parents with love and respect and therefore proved to be a good son. "That the seed of God's fear had been felt in him" could also be seen in his behavior in the face of death. In his last conversation with one of his servants after his fall, Füssel reported, he had shown no sign of fear, but had stayed firm in his faith and submitted himself to God's will: "So the end was joyful, and without bitterness of death."<sup>51</sup>

While this account might certainly be idealized, it was nevertheless based on a simple truth: the deceased court dwarf was a Christian like everybody else. "He was born at Rillichhausen in the Duchy of Brunswick of poor but Christian parents," Füssel writes, "in the year after Christ's birth 1604, January 2, and was thus soon incorporated into Christ and his church through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, and received the name Just[us]."<sup>52</sup> That dwarfs were generally baptized members of the church and the local Christian community was an uncontested fact among contemporaries. Unlike in some cases of severe birth defects, baptism was not questioned in cases of dwarfism, because this was not conceived of as a disability, and also, more importantly, often not recognizable at birth but only visible in early childhood, when affected individuals lagged behind their peers in growth.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, dwarfs were generally Christians *before* they were recognized as dwarfs.

47 Jarzebowski has observed similar argumentation in funeral sermons for children from the academic middle class, which tended to present the death of a child as a sign of God's grace; "Loss and emotion."

48 "Denn Gott verlest sein Geschöpff nicht"; Füssel, *Klugheit*, 14v.

49 Ibid., 16v–17r.

50 Ibid., 17r.

51 "So ist je das Ende frewdig, vnd ohne bitterkeit deß Todes gewesen"; Füssel, *Klugheit*, 19r.

52 "ist er zu Rillichhausen im Hertzogthumb Braunschweig von zwar armen, doch Christlichen Eltern geboren, Im Jahr nach Christi Geburt 1604. den 2. Januarij, vnd also bald durch das Sacrament der Heiligen Tauff Christo vnnd seiner Kirchen einverleibet worden, vnd hat den Nahmen Just empfangen"; ibid., 144.

53 While natural and medical causes of dwarfism have been discussed since antiquity and gained strong interest in the Renaissance, they were not the dominant paradigm before the



Like other young people and children at court, dwarfs often received a religious education, which was considered to be a general basis for court service. For example, in 1602 Johann Sigismund's mother Catherine, electress of Brandenburg, made expenditures for a catechism for a female dwarf in her household.<sup>54</sup> In 1654, the archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Ernst Adalbert von Harrach, confirmed the dwarf of the Margravine Barbara Eusebia of Brandenburg.<sup>55</sup> And the duke of Württemberg in 1735 even made up a formal agreement with his footman for the care of his young dwarf Georg Wurster, in which he explicitly stated that the wife of the footman should "instruct the said dwarf ... in Christianity ... as best as possible (just as she has already taught him to read in addition to learning all kinds of beautiful prayers)."<sup>56</sup> In Catholic Salzburg, finally, the court dwarf Johann Franz von Meichelböck who was renowned for his piety, made up his own testament, donated a particle of the "Holy Cross" to the chapel of his brother-in-law and established a perpetual mass foundation at the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.<sup>57</sup>

Justus Bertram, too, had certainly received a basic religious education and was able to read and write, but he lived in a charged political and confessional climate.<sup>58</sup> In 1613, his patron Johann Sigismund converted from Lutheranism to Calvinism together with a small circle of his entourage, while the vast majority of his subjects in Brandenburg and his wife Anna of Prussia remained Lutheran. Trying to mitigate the considerable political tensions that followed this event, the elector subsequently permitted his

age of Enlightenment. For a short sketch of the medical history of dwarfism, see Enderle, "Medizingeschichtliche Aspekte."

54 See the annual records of the *Hofrentei* for that year: Jahresrechnungen für die Ausgaben der Hofrentei, vol. 1 (1602), "Expenditure for the bookbinder" on November 6, *auch Vor ein Cathegismum Catharina Der Zwerigin*. GStA Berlin, I. HA Geheimer Rat, Rep. 36, no. 326.

55 On March 22, he noted in his diary: "Ho fatto ordinatione in casa, e tra' altri dato ancora al figliuolo della marchesa [Barbara Eusebia] di Brandeburg, Ferdinando Francesco Leopoldo [z Vrtby], di 12 anni, la crema e li 4 minori. La madre c'ha voluto lei medesima nella mia capella esserne presente, et ha condotto alla crema la sua nana, la sorella della Gasberowskin [Marie? Jezberovsky] et un'altra sua serva"; quoted in Keller and Catalano, *Die Diarien und Tagzettel*, 3:793.

56 The formal agreement (*accord*) between the duke and his footman Canillon from March 7, 1735 can be found in Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, A 21 Bü 370. The original reads: "Verbindet sich deßen Eheweib, mehrbesagten Zwerchen George ferner in Christenthum (gleichwie Sie Ihne auch bereits nebst Lernung allerhand schöner Gebether im Lesen vollkommen unterrichtet) bestmöglichst zu unterweisen."

57 The inventories of the Salzburg residences also list religious paintings, writing material, a clock, and a bookshelf in his rooms; Bauer, "Meichelböck," 261–63 and 286 ff.

58 Füssel mentions that the court dwarf had written to his father; *Klugheit*, 6r.

subjects to choose between Lutheranism and Calvinism according to their conscience.<sup>59</sup> Whether Bertram also converted to Calvinism is unknown; interestingly, however, the court preacher Füssel (who himself had been among the first to give Johann Sigismund communion according to the Calvinist rite), made no reference to Bertram's confession and clearly avoided any mention of predestination or other disputed doctrines.<sup>60</sup> Rather, he sought to find common ground between the deceased court dwarf, Reformed court society, and the wider community by centering his sermon around the "Children of God" (*Gotteskindschaft*) metaphor. With this leitmotif, which he used both for the exegesis and as the title of the sermon, he reminded his audience of their common Father and His omnipotence over life and death.<sup>61</sup> Like the court dwarf who did not know the hour of his death, one could never know which day would be the last. As Füssel put it, "the wisdom of the children of God" lay in their ability to contend with this vanity of life by seizing each day.<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, this line of argument was taken up in the exact same way almost a hundred years later by the court preacher Albrecht Stübner in his sermon for Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg. Tragically, in fact, the dwarf Georg Wilhelm had died under strikingly similar circumstances at the age of twenty: On a cold winter evening on January 30, 1714, he was on his way back from a visit to his parents, when, a short distance from the residence, he fell off his horse and suffered severe head injuries.<sup>63</sup> Although he was quickly brought to the Old Palace of Bayreuth and cared for "with spiritual and physical remedies," he died the same night, "very much lamented by both High-Princely Highnesses."<sup>64</sup> In the sermon the princely couple com-

59 After serious protests by the Lutheran clergy and parts of the Berlin population in 1615, Johann Sigismund allowed an exception from the general rule of *cuius regio, eius religio* in the Holy Roman Empire, according to which the religion of the ruler dictated the religion of his subjects. For an overview of these events, see Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 115–21.

60 On conceptions of dying in Calvinism, see Selderhuis, "Ars Moriendi."

61 For the historical and cultural meaning of this metaphor, see Lutterbach, "Gotteskindschaft." Interestingly, Johann Bergius, another Brandenburg court preacher, used the same metaphor when he appealed to the unity of all Christians as brothers in a sermon from 1631; see Wischmeyer, "Hofprediger," 159 ff. The same motive was used in another funeral sermon for a preacher who had fallen down a staircase and died in 1661; see Mohr, *Der unverhoffte Tod*, 62.

62 Füssel, *Klugheit*, 9r.

63 Stübner, *Wie Ungewißheit der Menschen Todtes-Stunde*, 19–22.

64 "von einem andern mitleidigen Christen / der ihn von ferne stürzten sahe / und ihm zu Hülffe kommen wollte / aufgehoben / auf den Armen getragen / und in das Hoch-Fürstliche Schloß gebracht ... / da er dann von beeden Hoch-Fürstlichen Durchlauchtigkeiten sehr bedauert / mit aller Verpflegung versehen / und ihm sowohl mit geistlichen als leiblichen Hülffs-Mitteln an die Hand gegangen worden"; *ibid.*, 22.

missioned for the funeral, Stübner placed the deceased in a long line of other people who had died the same way and explicitly pointed out the parallels to Justus Bertram.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, he followed the same pattern as his predecessor Füssel when he preached about the unpredictability of death (based on Eccl. 9:12) and emphasized that Georg Wilhelm was not only a skilled horseman, but also a good Christian and son. “We hope in the goodness and mercy of the great God,” Stübner concludes, evoking the metaphor of the Children of God, “as the right Father, over all that are called children, in heaven and on earth, to have taken care of and shown mercy to his poor soul, redeemed by the blood of Christ, in the time of death.”<sup>66</sup>

### III. The Son

The motif of Justus Bertram as a “Child of God” connected him to a larger social and religious community, but also served as a rhetorical means to characterize his path to the court and his relationship with the ruling prince. By drawing an analogy between the love of the divine Father and the love of his earthly parents as well as the care of the prince-elect, Füssel not only offered a religious perspective on dwarfs as Christians but also a theologically based justification for their presence at court. Consequently, he presented Justus Bertram as a son in three different but strongly interconnected ways: as a son of God, a son of his parents, and, in a way, as a son of the princely couple.

According to Füssel, the love of God towards his creature Bertram was first and foremost reflected in the love of the parents towards their child before this love found its expression in the care of nobles and princes. Justus Bertram’s parents—his father Heinrich Bertram and his wife Katharina, “who are good, poor farmers,”—had started to worry when they realized that their son had stopped growing at the age of seven.<sup>67</sup> But “Is not the

65 “So ist auch bekannt / daß des Chur-Fürsten zu Brandenburg / Johann Sigmunds / liebgewesener Cammer-Zwerg / Namens Just Bertram, zu Danzig / von seinem kleinen Pferd abgeworffen worden / und bald hernach Todtes verblichen” (It is also known that the elector of Brandenburg, Johann Sigmund’s beloved chamber dwarf, named Just Bertram, was thrown from his small horse in Gdansk and died soon thereafter); *ibid.*, 19.

66 “Wir hoffen zu der Güte und Barmherzigkeit des grossen Gottes / es werde / als der rechte Vater / über alls was Kinder heisset / im Himmel und auf Erden / sich seiner armen Seele / die durch Christi Blut erlöset worden / in der Todtes-Noth angenommen und erbarmet haben”; *ibid.*, 22 ff.

67 His brother and his sisters all had “their right length” except for a younger sister, then aged five, who “shall be quite similar to this dead boy, and also remain so small”; *ibid.*, 14v, 15v.

smallest child the dearest child, is not the sickest child the dearest child? Doesn't the mother call to him sooner and pay more attention to him than to the healthy and big one? If you, then, who are evil," Füssel rhetorically asked his audience, "can give good care to your children, how much more will my Heavenly Father do so! ... No father on earth can do for his children what the Father in heaven does for them."<sup>68</sup> It was no coincidence therefore that the parents were soon comforted by a nobleman: "they should not be concerned about the dear child: it would be well taken care of, which the outcome [of his story] has confirmed."<sup>69</sup> Because God, the preacher resumed, had given him the bread to eat "from the great lords' table" that his father could not afford.<sup>70</sup>

Following this narrative, the young dwarf's path to court service was not the result of a pleasure-seeking prince assembling a collection of "living marvels," but instead was part of a greater scheme by a loving divine Father. While Justus Bertram is presented as a child in need of help, whose bodily appearance made him the object of particular parental love, his admittance into the court is portrayed as an act of charity and princely care. Here, of course, Füssel evokes typical elements of monarchical doctrine and the topos of a good Christian ruler: The prince, by analogy with God as father and the Christian housefather, appears in the role of the *Landesvater* (father of the country) and God's representative on earth, with grace and mercy as his central Christian virtues. To take dwarfs into court service was thus nothing other than his Christian duty as a prince.

This discourse, which obviously served to idealize the prince and remind him that he ultimately derived his authority from God, was a typical undercurrent in early modern religious and political literature.<sup>71</sup> Notwithstanding this stylized pattern, the sermon does offer some important insights into a court dwarf's social background and his path to court. Here, too, Justus Bertram seems to be no exception. Like the Brandenburg court dwarf,

68 "Ist nicht das kleinste Kind, das liebste Kind, ist nicht das kranckste Kind das liebste Kind? Leufft ihm die Mutter nicht eher zu, vnd hat genawer acht darauff, alß auff das gesunde vnd grosse? Könnet ihr nun, die ihr böse seyd, ewren Kindern gute gaben geben, wie viel mehr wird mein Himlischer Vater das thun! ... Kein Vater auff Erden kan das thun bey seinen Kindern, was der Vater im Himmel bey ihnen thut"; *ibid.*, 16r.

69 "sind aber von einer vornehmen Person, wol getröstet worden: Sie sollen deß lieben Kindleins halben vnbekümmert sein: Es würde wol versorget werden. Welches auch der außgang also bezeuget hat"; *ibid.*, 14v.

70 *Ibid.*, 16v.

71 For an extensive discussion of the topos of the *Landesvater*, see Münch, "Obrigkeit im Vaterstand." For similar invocations of princely virtues in sermons by Brandenburg court preachers, see Wischmeyer, "Hofprediger," 151.

most dwarfs in the German courts were sons and daughters of parents with little or no connection to the court and they entered court service during childhood when their dwarfism became visible.<sup>72</sup> As letters, petitions and financial accounts suggest, parents played a major role in this process; not only did they usually have a part in deciding their children's fate, but in some instances, they even brought their own children to court. For example, in 1695 a certain Claudia Cremer from Luxembourg presented herself to the court of Anna Maria Louisa de Medici (1667–1743) in Düsseldorf, wife of Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm II, and was soon accompanied home to pick up her dwarf son Matthias.<sup>73</sup> While some parents simply could not feed their children at home, others hoped for financial gains and chances of social advancement. Justus Bertram, too, seems to have been encouraged by his parents and regularly exchanged letters with his father. Shortly before his death, he had written to him to meet in Berlin at his return from Gdansk; as it turned out, however, it was not for a conversation, but as Füßel bitterly remarks, for a funeral “that he [the father] now attends with a sad heart.”<sup>74</sup> Bertram had even asked the elector to take care of his poor father after his death.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, Füßel's portrayal of the prince as the dwarf's father was more than mere idealization. At court, dwarfs were generally well taken care of. In addition to their wages and accommodation, as well as their religious education, dwarfs were at times trained in painting, dancing, riding, and fencing, and they were cared for in times of sickness and old age. Due to their service in the inner chambers of the household, dwarfs often enjoyed daily interaction with the ruler's family or acted as playmates for the prince's children.<sup>76</sup> While servants of a ruler's household were traditionally considered part of his extended family, dwarfs seem to have become the object of special parental care.<sup>77</sup> For example, Landgravine Barbara von Leuchtenberg (1495–1552) repeatedly asked her brother Albrecht, duke of Prussia, to give her one of his court dwarfs, promising in a letter from 1548

72 Based upon my analysis of records, most German court dwarfs seem to have entered court service between the ages of seven and ten. The aforementioned Georg Wurster, for example, was eight years old when he came to court. For an extensive discussion of recruiting patterns, see Seemann, *Hofzwerg*, chapter 2.

73 The travel routes of mother and son are recorded in detail in the electress's travel expense accounts; Wolf, *Kabinettskassenrechnungen*, 1:237–41.

74 Füßel, *Klugheit*, 6v.

75 *Ibid.*, 18r.

76 For further evidence on these aspects, see Seemann, *Hofzwerg*, 395–421. For similar observations with regard to female dwarfs at the Spanish court, see Ravenscroft, “Dwarfs.”

77 For this notion of *familia*, see Nolte, “Familie [engere].”

that "I would keep it as if it were my own child."<sup>78</sup> Tellingly, Justus Bertram, too, on his deathbed remembered not only his parents but also his servant and a "Mrs. Anuschen whom I regarded as mother," by whom he probably meant none other than the Electress Anna of Prussia.<sup>79</sup>

Given this proximity to the family of the ruler, it must come as no surprise that Justus Bertram received a proper and honorable Christian burial. This burial was not only a visible confirmation of his being a full member of the Christian community. In fact, both the ceremony and the highly symbolic place of interment (the Stiftskirche had served as burial place of the Hohenzollern dynasty since 1545) were clear indicators of the elector's personal esteem, his princely rank, and the social status of the court dwarf—a status that was successfully perpetuated by the printed funeral sermon and a stone marker probably installed in the collegiate church.<sup>80</sup> At the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, other German court dwarfs received similar honors after their deaths as well. In 1693 Sophie Katharina (1617–1697), widow of Count Anton Günther of Oldenburg, commissioned a commemorative plaque with an inserted framed portrait for her court dwarf Berinte Berends in the small church of Bockhorn in Northern Germany (figures 6.2 and 6.3).

Surrounded by three panel paintings depicting the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the court dwarf is shown dressed in a red fur-trimmed garment with a black wig, a walking stick and a dagger—attributes that, like the red feather-trimmed hat lying on a table, indicate an exceptionally high status of the dwarf. On the left side of the painting, he is accompanied by a skull and hourglass (symbols of death and mortality) and a group of angels with a "crown of honor," while the inscription praised the 28-year old as a "picture of virtue."<sup>81</sup> The aforementioned court dwarfs Johann Tramm and Georg Wilhelm

78 "ich wolt es halten, als wenns mein Kint wer"; Barbara von Leuchtenberg to Herzog Albrecht, September 30, 1548, GStA Berlin, XX. HA, Herzogliches Briefarchiv A2, no. 35 (1548).

79 "Sage Herrn Antonio meinetwegen gute Nacht, wie auch Fraw Anuschen, die ich alß Mutter gehalten"; Füßel, *Klugheit*, 18v. Anuschen is a diminutive of Anna.

80 For the history of the medieval Dom- or Stiftskirche, see Almer, *Calvinista Aulico-Politicus*, 208–12. On funeral rituals and the social order, see Koslofsky, *Reformation of the Dead*, 104–7. The original inscription of the epitaph in Latin is given in Füßel, *Klugheit der Kinder Gottes*, 1v. Its original placement and fate are unknown.

81 The plaque is still displayed in its original location. The full inscription reads: "Hie liegt ein Tugentbild, dem Gott und Menschen hold / Dem Hohe und Niedrige besonders wohl gewollt; / Mein Leser, merk an Ihm, was thugent gibt zu Lohne: / Es ist, mit einem Wort, die schönste Ehrenkrone. Her Berinte Berends ist geboren Anno 1665 gestorben Anno 1693 seines Alters 28 Jahr" (Here lies a picture of virtue, whom God and man hold dear / To whom the high and the low are especially well-disposed; / My reader, notice in him what virtue gives as a reward: / It



Figure 6.2 Commemorative plaque with inserted portrait for the court dwarf Berinte Berends, 1693. Church of St. Cosmas und Damian, Bockhorn, northern Germany. Photo: groenling@flickr.com with permission.



Figure 6.3 Detail from a commemorative plaque with inserted portrait for the court dwarf Berinte Berends, 1693. Church of St. Cosmas und Damian, Bockhorn, northern Germany, Photo: groenling@flickr.com with permission.

Laubenberg were given not only printed funeral sermons, but also impressive grave markers with honorific inscriptions in 1710 and 1714 respectively.<sup>82</sup> In the case of Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg, this took the form of a large monument that was executed by the renowned court sculptor Elias Rantz and erected at the site of the fatal accident (figure 6.4). While the sculpted bas-relief visualized

is, in a word, the most beautiful crown of honor. Berinte Berends was born in 1665 and died in 1693, aged 28 years); see Runge, *Die St.-Cosmas-und-Damian-Kirche in Bockhorn*, 5.

<sup>82</sup> The grave marker of Johann Tramm in the courtyard of the church of St. Mary in Torgau was formed of sandstone in the shape of a half-opened coffin. While one side showed a portrait of the deceased, the other contained an extensive inscription praising Tramm as a miracle of nature. The beginning reads: "Ein Wunder der Natur, liegt unter diesen Stein, / Ein Zwarg Sechs Viertel lang, war von Statur zwar klein, / Doch von Gemüthe groß, geschickt in vielen Sachen, / Dadurch er sich beliebt bey aller Welt kunnt machen; / In seinem Christenthum war er sehr wohl gelehrt, / Mit fleissigen Gebeth hat er GOTT stets verehrt, / Umb grosser Herren Gunst wust er sich zu bewerben, / Und endlich must' er auch, so, wie ein Grosser sterben" (A miracle of nature lies under this stone, / A dwarf six quarters long, though small in stature, / But great of mind, skillful in many things, / By which he could make himself beloved by all the world; / In his Christianity he was very well learned, / He always worshipped God with diligent prayer, / He knew how to win the favor of great lords, / At last he must die like a great man). The monument was destroyed around 1810, but the inscription is given in Steinbrecher, *Das durch GOTTes Wunder-Hand*, 7. See also Böttcher, "Die 'Hofzwerg' der Christiane Eberhardine," 66.





Figure 6.4 Elias Rantz, Grave marker for the court dwarf Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg, 1710, Bayreuth (now New Palace), Germany. Photo: Rabenstein, Christoph, and Ronald Werner. "Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg. Das Brandenburger Kammerzwerglein." In *St. Georgen. Bilder und Geschichten*, edited by Alexander Wild, 83–85. Bayreuth: Druckhaus Bayreuth, 1994, fig. 97.

the court dwarf's tragic fall from his horse, the inscriptions above and below the effigy reminded the viewer of the life and position of this beloved court dwarf and transformed his marker into a memorial to the dangers of a sudden death: "Stand still, O wanderer," the lower cartouche addresses the viewer, "and learn to see rightly how a misfortune can happen so soon. / Little Wilhelm was the delight of the court / and no one looked at him but with wonder. / But the end of his hours came quickly / brought about here by a fall from his horse."<sup>83</sup>

83 "Steh still, o Wanderer, und lerne recht erkennen, / wie sich ein Unglücksfall so bald ereignen kann. / Der kleine Wilhelm war des Hofes Lust zu nennen / und niemand schaute ihn als mit Verwunderung an. / Doch übereilte ihn das Ende seiner Stunden, / als er hier einen Fall von

## Conclusion

The funeral sermon of the court dwarf Justus Bertram and other court dwarfs discussed in this chapter offer illuminating insights into their social status, background, and parents, while providing an insight into how dwarfs could be honored from a religious perspective. In response to Justus Bertram's sudden and premature death, the court preacher Martin Füssel presented the dwarf as a "Child of God" and a model of Christian virtue. In doing so, the sermon provided a way of accepting dwarfism without questioning it as a punishment or mistake. Although the preacher depicted Justus Bertram as rare, delicate, and marvelous in his bodily appearance, he did not describe him as feeble or sick, nor did he present him as an object of humor—a fact that was most probably related to his being "proportionate" and "beautiful," features contemporaries considered rare and precious in dwarfs. Instead of looking at differences, the sermon focused on commonalities to offer his audience a way to identify. This was a common pattern in early modern funeral literature, which usually sought to idealize the deceased individual, and to convey general ideas of a good Christian life and death. That it was applied to a court dwarf speaks equally to Bertram's high standing at court and to the preacher's effort in pleasing the princely couple and the courtly audience. While highly idealized, the sermon still reflects a thoroughly typical life of a dwarf at German courts and presents a pattern that was taken up by later funeral sermons for similar cases. Like Justus Bertram, dwarfs were generally baptized members of a Christian community; notwithstanding their special status, they often received good care from their princely patrons, were well provided for, could actively participate in court life, and were, at times, honored with their own memorials after their death. In this and other courts, being a court wonder and a good Christian and son was evidently no contradiction.

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seinem Pferd gefunden." The cartouche above the relief recounted the circumstances of his death. The marker suffered severe damages during World War II, and is now placed in a passage at the New Palace of Bayreuth; see Rabenstein and Werner, "Georg Wilhelm Laubenberg."

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## About the Author

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# Part II

Spain and Italy





## 7. Ordinary Marvels: The Case of Dwarf Attendants in Habsburg Spain

*Janet Ravenscroft*

### Abstract

An examination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century portraits sheds light on the paradoxical situation of the dwarfs belonging to the Spanish Habsburg court. A critical analysis reveals how artists developed ways to depict people who were both objects of wonder and familiar courtiers. The images are divided into three categories: paintings of individuals; of dwarfs who appear alongside their royal master or mistress; and group portraits. The focus for the latter is *Las Meninas*, in which Diego Velázquez depicted the royal household with the achondroplastic dwarf Maribárbola Asquín and the proportionate dwarf Nicolasito Pertusato. Analysis of the portrait of a Mexican noblewoman with her indigenous companion has intriguing connections with *Las Meninas* that are explored here for the first time.

**Keywords:** achondroplastic dwarfism, proportionate dwarfism, Habsburg, *Las Meninas*, Diego Velázquez, Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán

My purpose in this chapter is to explore portraits of the royal family and their dwarfs at the Spanish Habsburg courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Conventionally, encounters between the two have been presented as a binary with the “normal/ideal” body of the elite figure at one extreme and the “anomalous,” non-standard dwarf at the other.<sup>1</sup> However, the royal family’s own impairments complicate who exactly is “normal” in this context, bearing in mind that “normal” is a modern term for what was conceptualized

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller assessment of ideas of “normality” within the Habsburg court setting, see Ravenscroft, “Invisible Friends,” 26–52.

in the early modern period as everyday phenomena on the one hand and uncommon phenomena on the other.<sup>2</sup> It is important to recognize that ideas about bodies—like the language we use to describe them—are not fixed, but extremely fluid, and culturally specific.<sup>3</sup> It is useful, therefore, to embrace the flexible, early modern approach, whereby the difference between “regular” and “anomalous” bodies was a matter of degrees rather than absolutes.<sup>4</sup> An assessment of the portraits can shed light on these complex issues, not least by revealing what aspects of a dwarf’s role and appearance were deemed worthy of memorialization on canvas and which were excluded.<sup>5</sup>

In Spanish courts, dwarfs were counted among the *gente de placer* (literally “people of pleasure”), whose number included people of average height who entertained with a mixture of physical and verbal humor, and the *locos*—a loose category that embraced the talkative as well as the genuinely insane.<sup>6</sup> Despite their common role as entertainers, the *gente de placer* were judged differently depending on whether their unconventional bodies or behavior were understood to be natural or artificial.<sup>7</sup> In the case of dwarfs, there was no question that their unusual physique was God-given and natural, whatever their condition: the word *enano* was used for all dwarfs when Sebastián de Covarrubias compiled the first Spanish dictionary in 1611 (*Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española*).<sup>8</sup> He nonetheless made a clear distinction between dwarfs whose bodies were characterized as twisted and lacking harmony, and those whose limbs were well proportioned and smooth.<sup>9</sup> One reason for this privileging of the latter is that proportion

2 I am using the term “impairment” bearing in mind Irina Metzler’s summary of its use by disability studies scholars of “impairment being the physical condition, and disability the social construction of an impairment”; “Social Model,” 59–61. The term *normal* did not appear in the Spanish lexicon until 1869, at which time it was defined as “Lo que se halla en su natural estado. / Lo que sirve de norma ó regla” (That which is in its natural state. / That which serves as the norm or rule); *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*, 540.

3 For a precis of the arguments around the fluid nature of dis/ability, see Frohne, “Cultural Model,” 61–63.

4 Elsewhere I have discussed dwarfs’ physicality through the lens of the “variable” body, making use of a concept developed by Professor Chris Mounsey and explored in a series of VariAblit(ies) conferences and treated in Mounsey and Booth, *Variable Body in History*.

5 I will engage with questions of attribution and dating only where relevant to my argument.

6 In the *Tesoro*, Covarrubias provided definitions for various categories of entertainer, including the *bufón* (243), *chocarrero* (437), *loco* (770), and *truhán* (981).

7 For the entertainers’ moral status, see Bouza, *Locos*, 87.

8 Covarrubias was a member of Philip II’s court in the 1570s and 1580s, where he served as chaplain to the king. The dictionary is dedicated to Philip III, who organized its publication.

9 Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, 511.

was key to Renaissance conceptualizations of beauty.<sup>10</sup> Height is not mentioned—the dwarf is simply described as an *hombre pequeñito*: a man, albeit a very small one.<sup>11</sup> The lexicographer named a number of Habsburg dwarfs to elucidate his terms and reinforce his accounts, providing us with a useful insight into the court context.<sup>12</sup>

To be a “dwarf” (*enano/enana*) at the Spanish court was not an official role with a start date and regular monetary payments. Instead, dwarfs were paid by the offices of different departments and it was from these that José Moreno Villa was able to compile his catalog of the court entertainers in 1939, while serving as director of the palace archives in Madrid.<sup>13</sup> His listing is incomplete and often contradictory, due in part to the fact that the palace bureaucrats did not always differentiate between dwarfs and “fools” when they entered their names in the records.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, Moreno Villa’s catalog provides us with the given names and a few dates and details relating to over seventy dwarfs living at court between 1563 and 1700, the year in which the incoming Bourbon monarch expelled all the entertainers, including one Miguelillo. This dwarf was in the palace records from 1670, went on royal progresses, and belonged to Queen Mariana’s (1634–1696) household from 1685. Then, an order came from the new French king Philip V (r. 1700–46) that Miguelillo’s payments from the royal bakery, wine cellar, chandlery, and provisions store were to be suspended from April 6, 1700 most specifically “as though he had died.”<sup>15</sup>

10 Panofsky, *Meaning*, 89.

11 Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, 511. Despite not giving the height of dwarfs, Covarrubias tells us that pygmies measure one *codo*: an exceptionally tiny 18 in. (45cm) tall. (A *codo* was a unit of measurement based on multiplications of a hand span.)

12 Estanislao’s fame was such that he was cited as an example of an acceptable (proportionate) dwarf several decades after his death; *ibid.*, 511. For more on Estanislao, including the lost portraits and his association with Anthonis Mor’s *Cardinal Granvelle’s Dwarf* discussed further in this essay, see Ravenscroft, “Invisible Friends,” 38–40. Since that article was written, I have become less certain that the dwarf in Mor’s portrait can unequivocally be described as “proportionate,” one of several factors that problematize the identification of the dwarf in Anthonis Mor’s painting as Estanislao.

13 Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*.

14 “[E]ntre enanos y locos no hacían diferencia los papeles de Palacio”; Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 37.

15 *Ibid.*, 117. Moreno Villa found references to two giants in the records. Of these, Juan Biladons was painted twice, once with Philip III’s “fool” Rollizo; *ibid.*, 79–80, 139. Sadly, no known paintings of either man survive. There is, however, Vicente Carducho’s huge canvas (246 × 205 cm), *Cabeza Colossal* (Colossal Head, ca. 1635, Prado, Madrid), which was once displayed with Velázquez’s dwarf and jester paintings at the Torre de la Parada. All that is recorded about the second giant (*El Gigante*) is that he was at court between 1677 and 1679 and was black; *ibid.*, 102.

During the Habsburg reign, dwarfs were much sought-after and brought to court from across Spain, from France, Germany, England, the Spanish Netherlands, Poland, Milan and other parts of Italy, Portugal, and further afield. Two of the ways in which they came were in the entourages of foreign princesses and other dignitaries, or presented as human gifts. These marvelous people were so precious that there was fierce competition for them. In fact, King Philip II's eldest daughter Isabel Clara Eugenia (1566–1633)—then the archduchess of Austria and co-governor of the Spanish Netherlands—complained in a letter that “the French” had twice tried to steal an unidentified male dwarf whom she wanted to send as a gift to her family in Spain.<sup>16</sup> Isabel did succeed in dispatching others, including Miguel Soplillo who was sent to replace the famous Bonamí (at court 1606–13), who had died.<sup>17</sup>

The dwarfs had the privilege of living at the palace, eating at court, and receiving luxurious clothes and gifts, as well as necessities from the households they served. This set them apart from human marvels (*monstruos* in contemporary terms) with arguably more striking physical conditions, such as the “bearded lady” Brígida del Río—who caused a sensation in 1590—and the conjoined Genovese twins Lazarus and Joannes Bautista Colloredo who were in Madrid in 1629.<sup>18</sup> “Wonders” such as these were only temporary visitors whose likenesses were captured, but who barely ever became part of the royal household.<sup>19</sup> Most importantly from our perspective, they did not share pictorial space with members of the royal family: the Habsburgs rendered visible the dwarf's special status by including them in their own portraits, albeit generally in subsidiary roles. It is frequently their position beneath a royal hand that allows us to identify an unknown person in a

16 Isabel and her husband (and second cousin) Archduke Albert VII acted as rulers of the Netherlands from 1601. After Albert's death in 1621, she stayed on as governor general on behalf of the Spanish crown until her own death. For the letter, see Vergara, “La pintura,” 67. For the political role of ladies-in-waiting in Isabel's Brussels court after Albert's death, see Houben and Raeymaekers, “Women and the Politics of Access.”

17 Bonamí's delicate and perfectly proportioned body was marveled over by contemporary commentators, such as Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, Fray Andrés de Fuentalpeña, and José V. del Olmo, all of whom cited him as proof of the existence of pygmies; see Nieremberg, *Curiosa*, 91–92, and Río Parra, *Una Era*, 244–45. His fame was such that he became one of the models of the acceptable dwarf in Covarrubias's dictionary of 1611, written when Bonamí was serving at court; *Tesoro*, 511. Sadly, no known portraits of Bonamí survive. A painting of Soplillo is discussed in n. 37 below.

18 *Brígida del Río* by Juan Sánchez Cotán (1590, Prado, Madrid). For Lazarus and Joannes Bautista Colloredo, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lazarus\\_and\\_Joannes\\_Baptista\\_Colloredo#/media/File:Lazarus\\_and\\_Joannes\\_Baptista\\_Colloredo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lazarus_and_Joannes_Baptista_Colloredo#/media/File:Lazarus_and_Joannes_Baptista_Colloredo.jpg).

19 Bouza, *Locos*, 58.

double portrait as a proportionate dwarf: their names are seldom recorded in the inventories.

In the sixteenth century, standards for the body and behavior of courtiers and kings were theorized as a happy medium, often in opposition to what they were not: for example, Fadrique Furió Ceriol set out the ideal age of the courtier as not younger than thirty or older than sixty, and the ideal temperament was not melancholic or phlegmatic.<sup>20</sup> Baldassare Castiglione remarked on the quasi-monstrosity of extremely large and small men, noting that a courtier “should be neither too small nor too big, since either of these two conditions causes a certain contemptuous wonder and men built in this way are stared at as if they were monsters.”<sup>21</sup> Prescriptive texts such as these are useful for the light they shed on the dwarf’s role in the construction of this normal/ideal figure.

The Jesuit and natural philosopher Juan Eusebio Nieremberg was among the writers who presented contrast as an acceptable reason for the Habsburgs to keep dwarfs at court in the seventeenth century, at a time when certainties about their moral acceptability were being challenged. Specifically, he compared the dwarf’s function to that of a mole or blemish, which enhanced an otherwise lovely complexion.<sup>22</sup> In 1675, Fray Andrés de Villamanrique opined that it was the very rarity of the dwarfs’ “deformity” that made them precious.<sup>23</sup> A dwarf’s anomalous stature was therefore doubly valuable: it was wonderful in itself and also served to emphasize the “normality” and social superiority of the elite figures at court and in paintings.<sup>24</sup>

A double portrait of Margarita of Austria (1584–1627) by Bartolomé González (1564–1627) is typical in this regard. Portraits were habitually created and exchanged with members of other branches of the Habsburg family, yet this one is unusual because the queen is so obviously pregnant (figure 7.1). Such an unequivocal depiction of pregnancy is rare in the Spanish tradition; generally, the condition was referred to in accompanying letters, but not rendered visible.<sup>25</sup> Margarita was at the heart of the Habsburg dynasty, being the granddaughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand

20 Furió Ceriol, *Concejo y consejeros*, 60v–61v.

21 Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 61. Castiglione was appointed papal envoy to the court of Charles V and therefore had close ties to the Habsburg court.

22 Nieremberg, *Curiosa y oculta filosofía*, 92.

23 Andrés de Villamanrique, *Singularidad histórica, la más peregrina y rara en su línea*; cited in Alcalá Zamora, *La vida cotidiana*, 218.

24 “[L]os monstruos deben existir para poder, por contraste, definir y resaltar lo normal”; Río Parra, *Una Era*, 42.

25 Serrera, “Alonso Sánchez Coello,” 50.



Figure 7.1 Bartolomé González, *Archduchess Margarete of Austria, Queen of Spain, with a Female Court Dwarf, Carrying a Monkey*, ca. 1601. Oil on canvas, 192 × 120 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna © KHM-Museumsverband.

I (r. 1556–64) whose elder brother, Charles V, had been emperor before him. Margarita was just fifteen years old when she married her cousin Philip III (r. 1598–1621), and had eight children in eleven years. Of these, four were boys, including the future Philip IV (r. 1621–65), who was born in April 1605. Her fertility made her a much-valued addition to the Hispanic branch of the family and it is reasonable to assume that this portrait was, in part, a celebration of her fecundity.<sup>26</sup> That the queen's pregnancy is displayed is, therefore, noteworthy; the presence of a dwarf companion, however, had become the norm. Proportionate dwarfs, as this woman appears to be, were valued in contemporary terms as perfect, miniature replicas of the ideal figure.

Margarita stands in the full-length, three-quarters pose that had become conventional for royal subjects. She looks straight out at the viewer. In her left hand she holds a white lace-trimmed handkerchief; her right hand hovers over the head of an attendant dressed in a red gown and ornate ruff like that worn by the queen.<sup>27</sup> The smaller figure was formerly labeled by the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna as a child, but this identification seems highly unlikely because there was no convention in Spanish Habsburg court portraiture for the monarchs to include their own offspring in double portraits of this type.<sup>28</sup> Instead, the hand-on-head pose had become synonymous with dwarfs.<sup>29</sup>

26 While not addressing the specific situation of royal women, Wiesner-Hanks provides a useful summary both of the experience and of ideas surrounding pregnancy and childbirth in early modern Europe; *Women and Gender*, 92–99.

27 It is in the nature of these double portraits that the position of the arm barely changes whether the support is a person, a piece of furniture, or a dog. For an example with furniture, see Pantoja de la Cruz's *Margaret of Austria, Queen of Spain* (1607, Prado, Madrid); for a dog, see Bartolomé González's *Queen Margaret of Austria* (1609, Prado, Madrid), in which the queen is accompanied by the hound Bailan (see also n. 65 below).

28 "[D]ecorum did not allow for the monarchs to be portrayed with the infantes"; see Mulcahy, *Philip II*, 284, who also refers to the attendant as "a female midget" (285). Among critics who have described the smaller figure as the queen's daughter Anna is Pérez Sánchez, "El retrato clásico español," 211. The Kunsthistorisches Museum has now updated the English description of the "child" to that of "female court dwarf"; by email to the author, July 31, 2023.

29 The most notable exception to this rule is *Isabel Clara Eugenia with Magdalena Ruiz* by Alonso Sánchez Coello (ca. 1585–88, Prado, Madrid). In it, the family servant and *loca* Magdalena Ruiz was depicted holding two titi monkeys as she knelt alongside the princess. There are no contemporary records describing Magdalena as a dwarf, an identification that began in 1939 with Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 140–41. For a discussion of the painting, see Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 156–66. For the family's long-standing affection for Ruiz as evidenced in Philip II's letters to his daughters, see "Philip II: A Pen Portrait," 25–28. Other exceptions feature Magdalena Ruiz's first mistress, Doña Juana of Portugal (Juana of Austria): Cristóbal de Morales's portrait of her with what appears to be a black child (ca. 1553, Musée des Beaux Arts, Brussels); and Sofonisba



An example created at the time that these women were exchanging portraits is Frans Pourbus the Younger's (1569–1622) portrait of Margarita's sister-in-law, Isabel Clara Eugenia, in which the hand of the archduchess hovers over the blonde curls of a proportionate dwarf.<sup>30</sup> This dwarf holds a glove in her right hand; her left hand is extended behind the archduchess's body, as though resting on her own wide green skirt. Her fair hair and bodice are decorated with red ribbons, and both she and Isabel wear pearl earrings that fall against the same type of fashionable ruff as worn by Margarita and her companion. The shadow that artists habitually painted beneath skirts adds to the impression that royal Spanish women were ethereal creatures who floated above the ground. Indeed, to enhance the fiction of superior height, from the age of fourteen aristocratic women wore very high over-shoes called *chapines*.<sup>31</sup>

Like Isabel Clara Eugenia, Queen Margarita has the fair skin, distinctive jawline, and reddish hair appropriate to a Habsburg. Her dwarf companion is elegantly dressed and dignified by being portrayed full-length. Unusually she wears a red gown, rather than green, which was the color most often worn by entertainers in Spanish courts.<sup>32</sup> In keeping with the fashion of the time, both she and the queen appear to be rouged, but the dwarf woman's cheeks are rounder and more prominent.

Margarita's dwarf holds a tamarin or marmoset, small monkeys native to South America, an area then controlled by Spain. New World monkeys such as these were emblematic of empire, but also popular court pets that, the records show, were often dressed in silks and taffeta.<sup>33</sup> The marmoset

Anguissola's portrait (ca. 1561, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston) in which Juana's hand curves around her companion's shoulder. This action suggests that the attendant might be a child because I am not aware of a painting in which a dwarf is embraced in this manner.

30 The painting of *The Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia* (1566–1633), *Archduchess of Austria* (ca. 1598–1600, Royal Collection Trust) was presented to Anne of Denmark (queen to James I of England/James VI of Scotland) in 1603. Despite not mentioning her in the title, the gallery concurs that the companion is a dwarf. There is an almost identical painting at the Descalzas Reales in Madrid, the convent founded by the Emperor Charles V's daughter, Juana of Portugal. This version originally belonged to another of Isabel Clara Eugenia's aunts, the Empress Maria of Austria, and was passed on the latter's death to her daughter Margarita of the Cross, who was a nun there.

31 For the use of *chapines*, see Bernis, "La moda," 87. For height as part of what separated their "highnesses" from the rest, see Porter, *History of the Body*, 211.

32 Bouza, *Locos*, 109–10. Green was also worn by the royal family in the run-up to spring, and when they were out hunting; Sánchez Ortíz, "Juegos cromáticos," 100. Diego Velázquez portrayed Philip IV in hunting green (*Philip IV in Hunting Dress*) in a painting made for the Torre de la Parada hunting lodge (ca. 1632), now in the Prado.

33 Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 36.

might therefore have been included in the painting of Margarita because it was a valuable gift—perhaps like the dwarf woman who holds it.<sup>34</sup>

Pairings such as this are representative of court life, in which royal men and women were served by splendidly dressed dwarf attendants who added to the visual impact of the entourage when they took their places alongside ladies- and gentlemen-in-waiting of standard height.<sup>35</sup> Nor were double portraits with dwarfs limited to female subjects: a contemporaneous portrait of Margarita's brother depicts the Emperor Ferdinand II (1578–1637) accompanied by a *Hofzwerg* (court dwarf) in a green suit.<sup>36</sup> The dwarf appears to be held firm beneath Ferdinand's right hand yet, at the same time, is being tugged across the canvas by the small, white dog he holds on a cord.

A subsequent example is the double portrait of the future Philip IV of Spain with Miguel Soplillo (at court 1615–59) by Rodrigo de Villandrando (ca. 1589–1623, Prado, Madrid). The prince's companion was sent as a gift by his aunt Isabel Clara Eugenia, arriving with a great deal of theater.<sup>37</sup> Villandrando's composition closely resembles that used by Bartolomé González in his painting of Philip IV's mother, Margarita, and in Frans Pourbus's depiction of Isabel Clara Eugenia. In each case, the dwarfs fit comfortably under their highnesses' hands, suggesting that the artists may have played with scale to create such precise arrangements. In Villandrando's painting, the prince's right hand curves across the top of Soplillo's head in a gesture that is both protective and infantilizing. Male dwarfs were often considered to be sexually ambiguous and therefore unthreatening, which may partly explain why Soplillo was the only male performer to appear in a masque alongside Philip IV's first wife, Isabel de Bourbon, and their daughter on the

34 Small monkeys of this type commonly feature in individual portraits, especially of the royal children. For example, Pantoja de la Cruz depicted Margarita's three-year-old daughter, the Infanta Anna María Mauricia (1601–1666) with a monkey on a chain (*Infanta Anna (1601–66), Queen of France, with a Lion Tamarin*, 1604, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). Anna's younger sister María Anna (1608–1646) was captured in a similarly regal pose with her hand cupping the head of an identical creature in *Maria Anna of Hapsburg, Infanta of Spain, later Archduchess of Austria and Holy Roman Empress and Queen of Hungary (1606–1646)*, by Juan Pantoja de la Cruz or Bartolomé González (ca. 1608–10, Cliveden Estate, Buckinghamshire, National Trust Collections).

35 Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 147–77.

36 The portrait of *Emperor Ferdinand II (1578–1637) with a Dwarf*, painted in 1604 by Joseph Heintz the Elder is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

37 Soplillo arrived with four carriages, twenty horses and a miniature army as gifts for Prince Philip; Bouza, *Locos*, 52. On another occasion, Isabel Clara Eugenia presented a female dwarf in a cage to her grandmother, telling Catherine de' Medici that the voice she heard was that of a multilingual parrot, before revealing the woman. This episode demonstrates the Infanta's enjoyment of the theatricality of dwarf gifts; Brown, "Mirror and the Cage," 137.

occasion of the prince's birthday.<sup>38</sup> In this portrait, he serves to emphasize the contrasting masculinity and virility of the juvenile prince who was responsible for the continuation of the Habsburg dynasty. Despite the height difference, there are obvious resemblances between the two young men: both are finely dressed, wear heavy gold chains and have swords on their left hips. Soplillo carries a plumed hat like the prince's, which may refer to his privileged position as royal favorite given that only members of the nobility were permitted to wear a hat in the king's presence.<sup>39</sup> He certainly enjoyed a long career at court, arriving in 1615 and dying on January 22, 1659, having spent over forty years at the epicenter of power.<sup>40</sup>

Analysis of depictions of the Spanish Habsburgs' dwarfs has tended to concentrate on an unnecessarily low number of paintings, and—in particular—studies have been overwhelmingly focused on works by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599–1660).<sup>41</sup> The result of this concentration on the work of one artist—brilliant though it is—is a fragmented view that fails to take into account the long tradition of Spanish court portraiture to which Velázquez belongs. It is in part due to this elevated position that his dwarf portraits have received more critical attention than those by his predecessors and close contemporaries. Another factor may be that we know the names of many of his subjects. Sitters who are perceived to be of low status and whose names are not recorded are more likely to be stereotyped as types: fool, dwarf, servant, and such like. Stereotyping of this kind has been described as a strategy that “reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” and “divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable.”<sup>42</sup> It is an approach that can overlook the complexity of the dwarf's liminal status as both a rarity and a living, breathing member of the court.<sup>43</sup> The absence of a name also makes it virtually impossible to identify a dwarf with complete confidence.

Reuniting work created within the same socio-historical setting highlights the portraits' inter-textuality, drawing upon Ivan Gaskell's argument that paintings should not be studied in isolation because each has “its own life

38 Marqués, *Catálogo*, 72.

39 Elliott, *Spain and Its World*, 152.

40 Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 143.

41 Calvo Serraller, *Spanish Painting*, 31, 47–8.

42 Hall, *Representation*, 257–58.

43 I embrace Gaskell's argument that “to assume through lack of evidence that she [a portrait subject] had no counterpart in actuality, would be to risk acquiescing in the annihilation of a person”; *Vermeer's Wager*, 231.

in a continuous complex dialectic with other complex artefacts, and with those who use them."<sup>44</sup> With this in mind, I intend to draw upon a few instances where Velázquez's debt to other artists can be seen, and draw attention to one unexpected link between *Las Meninas* and a painting created in Mexico some sixty years later.

*Las Meninas* (1656, Museo del Prado) is an astonishing painting, as anyone who has stood in front of it will attest. However, although the informal grouping was strikingly original at the time, its component parts spring from Habsburg court portraiture. What is most significant from the point of view of this essay is that the painting includes—and provides commentaries on—previous portraits in which royal adults and children are accompanied by a dwarf. It is noteworthy that the painting was first recorded as *La Señora Emperatriz con sus damas y una enana* (The Empress with her ladies and a female dwarf). It was subsequently known as *The Family of Philip IV* or just *The Family*: a fitting title, given that it captures the daily interaction between the different kinds of people who made up the household or the wider family in the early modern sense.<sup>45</sup> The painting, which used to hang in the king's private apartments, renders visible the access enjoyed by the dwarfs—a factor that made their position an enviable one at a time when everything was done to maintain distance between the monarch and his subjects so as “to preserve the sacred character of kingship.”<sup>46</sup> As the court historian John Adamson has noted, “Space was a hierarchical and politically charged commodity,” and physical closeness to the monarch could outweigh social position.<sup>47</sup> The dwarfs' status as examples of divine creativity and ingenuity allowed them access to the epicenter of power and gave them a degree of liberty and familiarity that was not permitted to “ordinary” courtiers who were hidebound by protocol.<sup>48</sup> In their case, bodily difference trumped gender, allowing dwarfs to cross the theoretically strict divisions between male and female households.<sup>49</sup>

44 Ibid., 27.

45 Cantón and Javier, *Velázquez*, 9, 10. For the definition of family, see Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, 584.

46 The painting originally hung in a room “destined for the personal use of the king”; Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 259. For the importance of distance, see Elliott, *Spain and Its World*, 143.

47 Adamson, *Princely Courts*, 13.

48 For the dwarf's marvelous status, see Céard, *La nature et les prodiges*, 14, 19–20.

49 See Mitchell and Oliván Santaliestra on the organization of the Spanish king and queen's households on gender lines quoted by Quintero in “Spaces of Female Sovereignty,” 188. However, as Persson points out in relation to a royal scandal at the contemporaneous and equally strict

The dwarfs' centrality to court life is evidenced in *Las Meninas*, which famously shows the young Infanta Margarita María (1651–1673) with a group of courtiers including a chaperone, two *meninas* (young maids-of-honor from noble families), her dwarf attendants, and the artist, who is caught in mid-action at his easel.<sup>50</sup> It is a scene that renders visible the interconnectedness of the royal family and their entourage, and the less formal conditions they enjoyed behind closed doors.<sup>51</sup> The venue for this encounter is the artist's studio at the Alcázar, in what were formerly the apartments of the late prince Baltasar Carlos (1629–1646).<sup>52</sup> Previously, artists had depicted dwarfs accompanying someone of average height, but here they are seen side-by-side: Maribárbola Asquín displays characteristics of achondroplasia, while Nicolo Pertusato has proportionate dwarfism.<sup>53</sup>

While undoubtedly the best known, *Las Meninas* was not Velázquez's first portrait to feature people with dwarfism. This was *Baltasar Carlos with a Dwarf* (figure 7.2).<sup>54</sup> The precise dating of the painting is not known, though it has been suggested that it might have been created to celebrate

Swedish court, "we must be aware that theory did not always match practice"; "Living in the House of Power," 352.

50 Individuals who are likely to be dwarfs subsequently appeared in other group portraits. It has been suggested that the two smaller figures in the background of *Doña Margarita de Austria* by Velázquez's son-in-law, Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo (ca. 1665–66, Prado, Madrid) are Mariana's son Charles II and Maribárbola. A male and female dwarf also attend Charles II in a second painting of Queen Mariana in mourning (1666, National Gallery, London), in which an attendant offers a small red jug to the prince: a detail with echoes of *Las Meninas*. The female dwarfs in both paintings have been posited as Maribárbola, despite there being no signs of achondroplasia in the former; Pérez Sánchez, *Monstruos*, 104.

51 As Duindam has noted, secluded court settings from which outsiders were excluded conform "somewhat to our notion of 'private'." He also makes the point that "there is no concordance here between male and public, or female and private: these oppositions cut through gender categories." Being a person with dwarfism further problematizes gender categories; "Politics of Female Households," 368.

52 Brown and Garrido, *Velázquez*, 181–94.

53 There are over 200 types of dwarfism, details of which can be found at Little People UK, "Types of Dwarfism."

54 On the portrait being the first of Velázquez's works to include a dwarf, see Pérez Sánchez, "Velázquez y el retrato barroco," 170. Velázquez subsequently painted Baltasar Carlos with a dwarf in *Prince Baltasar Carlos in the Riding School* (ca. 1636–39, National Gallery, London) illustrated with more clarity at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince\\_Baltasar\\_Carlos\\_in\\_the\\_Riding\\_School#/media/File:Lecci%C3%B3n\\_de\\_equitaci%C3%B3n\\_del\\_pr%C3%ADncipe\\_Baltasar\\_Carlos\\_by\\_Diego\\_Vel%C3%A1zquez.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Baltasar_Carlos_in_the_Riding_School#/media/File:Lecci%C3%B3n_de_equitaci%C3%B3n_del_pr%C3%ADncipe_Baltasar_Carlos_by_Diego_Vel%C3%A1zquez.jpg). The petite figure who stands to the right of the family in the doorway is likely be a dwarf woman, given the custom for having dwarfs in attendance. What appears to be a third dwarf holds a lance in a later version of the painting, now attributed to the studio of Diego Velázquez: *Prince Baltasar Carlos* (ca. 1640–45, The Wallace Collection, London).



Figure 7.2 Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *Don Baltasar Carlos and an Attendant*, 1632. Oil on canvas, 128.0 × 101.9 cm. Henry Lillie Pierce Fund, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photo: © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

the occasion on which the nobility swore an oath of allegiance to Philip IV's short-lived son and heir on March 7, 1632.<sup>55</sup> Whatever the occasion, it is a politically important painting given the centrality of the prince to the continuation of the dynasty. The figures are framed by an oriental carpet and

55 Brown and Elliott, *Palace for a King*, 56.

the heavy curtains typical of a court portrait of this kind. Baltasar Carlos is dressed in a richly embroidered costume with a gorget (an armored collar) and the red sash of a military commander. The sword he wears on his left hip and the staff of office also point to his future as a leader of men. There is no consensus about the age, identity, or gender of the dwarf who accompanies the toddler–prince, though I favor the view that he is a young boy.<sup>56</sup> The pinafore that he or she wears over the green skirt was typically worn by young children of both sexes.<sup>57</sup> The position of the dwarf's arms mirrors the prince's and emphasizes the presence of an apple and a rattle, the latter being an attribute of childhood.<sup>58</sup> The suggestion that "Velázquez evoked a time when the toys of a prince would become scepter and orb" is interesting, although there is no tradition of Spanish monarchs being portrayed with these accouterments.<sup>59</sup> The props may hint at the dwarf's license to "play the king" to amuse the court. Even though Baltasar Carlos was just an infant, he is represented in the manner developed by Philip II's court painter Alonso Sánchez Coello of the *niño adulto* (adult child).<sup>60</sup> Negative characteristics that were ascribed to children, such as being irrational, impetuous, and emotional, would be inappropriate for a future king; hence the importance of stressing the adult nature of the toddler–prince. By giving the childish attribute of the rattle to the dwarf, the artist plays upon his or her childlike stature and enhances Baltasar Carlos's precocious maturity by contrast.

Unlike in depictions of a royal adult with an attendant, both figures here are about the same height and Velázquez gives the dwarf a prominent pictorial role by placing him in front of and below the prince, who is in a raised position on a step or plinth.<sup>61</sup> By his feet, a feathered hat rests on a large cushion that takes up the place more commonly filled by a table or chair in adult portraits. By having the dwarf turn his head, Velázquez introduces movement and a sense of informality to a painting that has both a public and a private role. The dwarf's stance appears more natural and spontaneous than that of the prince, whose gravity and immobility are appropriate for a

56 Critics who suggest the dwarf may be female include Di Nepi, *Prince Baltasar Carlos*, 170, and Pérez Sánchez, who refers to the figure as *una enana*; "Velázquez y el retrato barroco," 170. Those who assume the dwarf is male include Ruiz Gómez, "Retratos de corte," 106; Davies, "El Primo," 175; and Gállego, "Manías y pequeñeces," 19.

57 Moreno Villa's identification of the dwarf as Francisco Lezcano is untenable because he did not enter Baltasar Carlos's service until 1634, when the prince would have been five years old; *Locos, enanos*, 107–10.

58 Bravo-Villasante, "Retratos de niños," 18.

59 Brown and Elliott, *Palace for a King*, 56.

60 Ruiz Gómez, "Retratos de corte," 106.

61 Di Nepi suggests the prince stands on a step; *Prince Baltasar Carlos*, 170.

future king. The message conveyed is that the prince is capable of governing his own childish body, the dwarf and—by extension—the Spanish empire that, sadly, he would not live to inherit.<sup>62</sup>

In *Las Meninas*, Queen Mariana—who had been betrothed to Baltasar Carlos—appears as a shadowy figure with her husband (and uncle) Philip IV in what is generally agreed to be a mirror on the back wall. It is a device that allows the royal couple to be part of the action, yet remain at one remove as decorum demanded.<sup>63</sup> The painting is full of references to previous images featuring dwarfs; for example, entering from the right foreground in a red suit, Nicolo Pertusato has one foot resting on the haunches of a large hunting hound, in a pose that plays upon the pictorial tradition of dwarfs standing motionless next to much larger dogs.

The earliest of these was *Cardinal Granvelle's Dwarf* by Anthonis Mor (ca. 1550) (see figure I.2). The subject has never been positively identified, but it is likely that he belonged to Granvelle's household because the latter's coat of arms is clearly visible on the collar of the dog by his side.<sup>64</sup> Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517–86) was one of the most powerful and influential members of the Habsburg court and was Mor's patron before the artist's appointment as Philip II's first court painter. In the portrait, the unidentified dwarf is depicted in a green suit and cap. Around his neck, he wears a heavy gold chain, and his ankle-length cloak is edged with gold braid and has gold tassels up the front. Commentators have remarked on what they see as the compositional similarities between this painting and *The Emperor Charles V with his Water Dog* by Jacob Seisenegger (1532, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), the first life-size, full-figure painting in the imperial court, which became the model for Spanish royal portraits. It also introduced the hound as a royal attribute and a metonym for hunting, an activity about which the Habsburgs were passionate.<sup>65</sup> The paintings can justifiably be compared in so far as the emperor was the ideal man against

62 Baltasar Carlos died in Zaragoza in October 1646, just a few days short of his seventeenth birthday.

63 Cameos were similarly used to bring the monarch into portraits of female family members. See for example *Isabel de Valois* by Sofonisba Anguissola (ca. 1561–65, Prado, Madrid). Another archetypal example is *Isabel Clara Eugenia with Magdalena Ruiz* by Alonso Sánchez Coello (ca. 1585–88, Prado, Madrid), reference above in n. 29.

64 Hymans, *Antonio Moro*, 129. Beuzelin has asserted that the subject is known as *Le nain Estanilao* though the basis on which the author bases this identification is not explained; "Le Fou, le Nain," 83. See also n. 12 above.

65 Given the importance of hunting hounds, it is likely that the dog was painted from life. Bailan was painted by Pantoja de la Cruz alongside the dwarfs Bonamí and Don Antonio in a work that is now lost, according to Moreno Villa; *Locos, enanos*, 84–85. Note, however, that



whom all other male figures were measured. According to the physician Juan Huarte de San Juan, a king should have god-like omniscience, and red-blond hair that turns gold with age.<sup>66</sup> Like the ideal courtier envisaged by Castiglione and Fúrio Ceriol, Huarte de San Juan's graceful man is of medium height and a model of perfection, from his inner balance to his outer appearance, which is a delight to look upon.<sup>67</sup> "Looking good" was not just about vanity: there was a political imperative allied to it because of the prevailing belief in physiognomy, according to which an ugly outer appearance was believed to indicate moral weakness. Therefore, when the living model did not quite come up to the mark, it was acceptable for portraitists to make use of *dissimulatio*, and to accentuate the positive.<sup>68</sup> In the case of Charles V (r. 1519–56), the task was to render visible the ideal ruler while, at the same time, capturing a recognizable likeness of a man whom contemporaries knew possessed a malformed jaw.

The protruding chin was a defining characteristic of the emperor in early portraits, such as Bernhard Strigel's family group—in which Charles appears with his father, Emperor Maximilian I—and a portrait by Barend van Orley.<sup>69</sup> In another small wooden panel created by an anonymous Flemish artist around the time that Charles became king of Spain, Charles is again presented in the Burgundian tradition with the Order of the Golden Fleece around his neck and a sprig of rosemary in his left hand.<sup>70</sup> Christoph

the painting of a *Dwarf with a Dog* (ca. 1640–45, Prado, Madrid) was formerly identified as *Don Antonio "El Inglés"* and attributed to Velázquez.

66 The king at the time was Philip II, to whom the book was dedicated; Huarte de San Juan, *Examen*, 579.

67 The Venetian ambassador's description of Philip II in 1575 bears a striking resemblance to Huarte de San Juan's description of the ideal king, thanks to his strong but delicate limbs and fair hair. The ambassador also remarks on Charles's Habsburg chin, noting that although the lower lip projects further than the top lip, "it isn't ugly but lends a kind of grace to the face"; Serrera, "Alonso Sánchez Coello," 47.

68 Another example of dissonance between appearance and reality concerns Charles's grandson and Philip II's heir, Don Carlos (1545–1568). Despite portraiture's focus on playing down a sitter's irregularities, traces of the boy's defects were still apparent in *Prince Don Carlos* by Alonso Sánchez Coello (ca. 1564, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), a painting made as part of marriage negotiations with the prince's cousin, Anna of Austria, Maximilian II's daughter. Maximilian's ambassador in Madrid (Baron Dietrichstein) reported that Don Carlos was extremely pale, with one shoulder higher than the other, the right leg shorter than the left, a sunken chest, and a curve in the spine at the level of his stomach. The Venetian ambassador likewise noted that his posture was bent and there was "something lacking" in the legs, concluding that *non é bello*; Serrera, "La Mecánica," 47.

69 Bernhard Strigel, *The Family of Emperor Maximilian I* (after 1515, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna); Barend van Orley, *Portrait of Emperor Charles V* (ca. 1515, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest).

70 *Emperor Charles V (1500–58)* (ca. 1514–16, Royal Collection Trust).



Figure 7.3 Christoph Amberger, *Emperor Charles V* (1500–1558), ca. 1530–40. Oil on panel, 67.2 × 50.7 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Germany. Photo: © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie/Jörg P. Anders; Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Amberger added a breast plate to introduce a military trope to his half-body portrait of Charles as the archetypal Renaissance prince with his book and fine gloves (figure 7.3). The way in which Charles's lower jaw juts out and his mouth hangs open in these images comes very close to a description by his biographer, Alonso de Santa Cruz (1505–1567): [Charles's] "most unattractive

feature was his mouth, as his lower jaw was so out of proportion to his upper that they never met, which resulted in two defects: one of speaking in a very harsh manner ... and the other that it was very difficult for him to eat."<sup>71</sup> An open mouth and teeth on show were signs denoting low-life characters and were, thus, inappropriate features for a ruler.

One of the things that makes the art of the period so fascinating is that we see a shift in the way that royalty was portrayed towards a naturalistic style. In Titian's version of Seisenegger's iconic painting, Charles's body is elongated and made more elegant, and his gaze is raised to make him appear more alert.<sup>72</sup> Although the "Habsburg lip" is further reduced beneath the neat, fashionable beard, Charles's mouth is still slightly open, a detail that hints at the defects recorded by Alonso de Santa Cruz.

Titian's portrait of Charles was originally kept in the old Alcázar Palace, so it is possible that Anthonis Mor saw it during one of the periods he spent in Madrid as painter to various members of the Habsburg family.<sup>73</sup> In Mor's painting (see again figure I.2) the dwarf gazes directly at the viewer, drawing us in as spectators so we are able to engage with the person portrayed in a way that is impossible with the emperor, who directs his focus beyond the edge of the canvas in an appropriately superior manner. Like Charles V in Seisenegger's and Titian's paintings, Mor's dwarf carries a sword.<sup>74</sup> However, unlike in the portraits of the emperor, the hilt of the sword is prominently positioned just below the center of the canvas, so that there might be a phallic joke in the way it points towards the dog's genital region. At the same time, the presence of the sword and baton in the hands of someone of exceptionally short stature could bring to mind popular ideas about the pugnacious dwarf and his warlike cousin, the pygmy. We know that dwarfs played the roles of pygmies in tournaments held at the Spanish court in the seventeenth century and were frequently referred to as *gigantes en cuerpo de pigmeos* (giants in the bodies of pygmies).<sup>75</sup>

Just as in the imperial model, Mor depicted the dwarf and dog in a featureless space that serves to concentrate the spectator's gaze on the two figures. The dog clearly lends scale to the painting, making the man's size unequivocal even if his proportions are not clear: his head and limbs appear

71 Falomir, "Court Portrait," 72.

72 *Emperor Charles V with a Dog* by Titian (1533, Prado, Madrid).

73 The Royal Alcázar was destroyed by fire, along with many paintings and other treasures, in the eighteenth century.

74 I am grateful to Robin O'Bryan for drawing my attention to chivalric swords as common accouterments for dwarfs in medieval and early modern imagery.

75 Bouza, *Locos*, 169.

to be in proportion to his body, although he has small hands and feet. The dwarf's facial expression has the kind of psychological depth that is often remarked upon in the works of Velázquez but largely omitted in analyses of those of his predecessors, to whom he owes a great debt.

As previously noted, in *Las Meninas* Velázquez played upon the well-established dog-dwarf pairing and its potential for humor when he depicted Nicolo Pertusato prodding a hound—an action that might hint at the dwarf's license to amuse the court by misbehaving. Thanks to Moreno Villa's catalog, we know that Pertusato came to court from Milan in 1650 and was granted a number of roles, including *ayuda de cámara* (valet), by Philip IV.<sup>76</sup> Seemingly lowly roles that involved passing the king a cup or a shirt were much sought after because they allowed access to the physical body of the monarch at a time when such access was a mark of privilege and one that equaled power.<sup>77</sup> Court roles brought with them social as well as material benefits.<sup>78</sup> From 1669, Nicolo was referred to in the royal accounts as “Don” Pertusato rather than the diminutive “Nicolasito,” an honorific possibly given in recognition of the many gifts and positions he was granted by the family, of whom he was plainly a favorite.<sup>79</sup>

Next to Pertusato is the achondroplastic dwarf Maribárbola Asquín, who is presented in the upright stance used for aristocratic women who never express emotion and certainly do not smile, laugh, or move to excess. She is not shown serving the princess, but instead stands to one side, the thumb and fingers of her left hand held up to her chest in an equivocal gesture. Her eyes, which are partly in shadow, gaze calmly out at the spectator. Anomalous bodies—be they extremely fat, extremely thin, or irregular in some other way—were seen as naturally funny and the royal family liked to be entertained at meal times because laughter was believed to be good for the digestion.<sup>80</sup> However, if Maribárbola did entertain by physical humor, there is no hint of it here. Instead, it is her dignified position as Queen Mariana's dwarf and companion to the young princess that is conveyed. She was part of the household for nearly fifty years, becoming the *Enana de la Reina* (Dwarf of the Queen) on the death of her previous employer,

76 Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 125–26.

77 Redworth and Checa, “Courts of the Spanish Habsburgs,” 50–51. As well as being privy to gossip, dwarfs might also act as informers, as was the case with Isabel de Valois's dwarf François Montaigne (Montaña); Bouza, *Locos*, 83.

78 Gállego, *Manías*, 17.

79 Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 126–29.

80 For excessive bodies as funny, see Furió Ceriol, *Concejo y consejeros*, 60v–61v. On the benefits of laughter, see Juan Luis Vives, *Tratado del Alma* in Bouza, *Locos*, 89–91.

a countess, in 1651. She was not unusual in having her own servants, in receiving clothes, and being given a daily ration of four pounds of ice in the summer. She eventually returned to Germany—“whence she came with the Queen”—on March 30, 1700, the year in which all the *gente de placer* were expelled from court.<sup>81</sup>

In his depiction of the young noblewoman and *menina*, María Agustina Sarmiento, Velázquez makes use of a composition that hints at one previously employed by Philip II's court portraitist, Alonso Sánchez Coello, in his study of an aristocratic child. This painting, identified as *Juana de Mendoza, La Duquesa de Béjar with her Dwarf* (ca. 1585), contains one of the first portraits of a dwarf in Spain.<sup>82</sup> Both sitters are children and Juana was not a princess but belonged to one of the grandest families in the country.<sup>83</sup> The dwarf's defining characteristics are emphasized by the profile view, a choice most usually associated with Florentine quattrocento art and popular in sixteenth-century Venetian depictions of dwarfs. Here, the boy's “attributes” are the prominent forehead and flattened bridge of the nose—indicative of achondroplasia—and his small feet beneath the long green coat or cassock. The sole of the foremost shoe is slightly raised as it disappears beneath the gold-embroidered hem of his mistress's deep-blue gown. Juana (1580–1641), carries the elite attribute of a pair of gloves, and appears to wear the white powder and rosy blush favored by Spanish Habsburg women.<sup>84</sup> By depicting the dwarf holding a salver at chest level, Sánchez Coello makes the height difference between

81 Moreno Villa, *Locos, enanos*, 66–67.

82 *Juana de Mendoza, La Duquesa de Béjar with her Dwarf* (ca. 1585, Banco Santander Collection) can be viewed here: <https://www.fundacionbancosantander.com/en/culture/art/banco-santander-collection/dona-juana-de-mendoza-duchess-of-bejar-with-a-dwarf>. On the use of the pose by Velázquez, see Camón Aznar, *Summa Artis*, 500. Sentenach made the identification based on the 1601 inventory of Don Íñigo de Mendoza, Juana's father; *La pintura en Madrid*, 28. This identification was later challenged by, among others, Allende Salazar and Sánchez Cantón, who believed the child to be Catalina Micaela (1567–1597), daughter of Philip II; *Retratos del Museo*, 106. This seems unlikely, given that Catalina Micaela would have been eighteen in 1585. Kusche has posited that the child was Margarita de Saboya (Savoy) (Catalina's daughter, born in 1589) and that the work was painted by Sofonisba Anguissola around 1593; see *Retratos y retratadores*, 259–63 for a summary of her argument. While seductive, the dating, costume, and other details make Kusche's identification unlikely and it has been rejected by scholars associated with the Prado. For a precis of the debate, see Portús Pérez, “Juana de Mendoza,” 339.

83 On its being one of the earliest dwarf portraits, see Mena Marqués, *Catálogo*, 62. A favorite of Philip II, Juana's father, Don Íñigo de Mendoza, the 5th duke of Infantado, accompanied the king when he traveled to England to marry Mary Tudor in 1556. When Philip subsequently married Isabel (Elizabeth) de Valois, the ceremony was held at the duke's palace in Guadalajara. Members of the Mendoza family were, therefore, intimate with royalty.

84 Davies, *Anatomy*, 74.

the pair look more believable than it might if the dwarf was under Juana's hand, foreshadowing Velázquez's use of similar "props" in *Las Meninas*.<sup>85</sup>

The inclusion of Maribárbola in Velázquez's group portrait placed a woman with achondroplasia center stage for the first time. This is hugely significant because, as far as I am aware, there is no other portrait of an achondroplastic woman created for the Spanish Habsburg court at this time, although paintings may have been lost because of fires, war, or neglect due to a lack of interest in the subject. Typical of a painting that has been overlooked for centuries is the double portrait created in Mexico (New Spain, or *Nueva España*) by Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán, newly entitled *María Luisa de Toledo e indígena* (María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous Companion, ca. 1670) (figure 7.4). The painting is noteworthy for a number of reasons and deserves further exploration building upon the pioneering work of Andrés Gutiérrez Usillos, who unearthed it from the storerooms of the Prado where it had lain unnoticed for almost 200 years. It is remarkable for being one of the very few portraits of women created in Mexico in the seventeenth century to survive—and one of those women is a dwarf.<sup>86</sup> The elite sitter, María Luisa de Toledo (marchioness of Melgar de Fernamental), was the daughter of the viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, marquis of Mancera. Both María Luisa's parents were members of powerful noble houses and were closely associated with the court and the cultural and intellectual elite in Spain and the New World.<sup>87</sup>

Particularly relevant to the current discussion is the fact that María Luisa's mother—Leonor María de Carreto (after 1635–1674)—belonged to the royal household depicted in *Las Meninas*.<sup>88</sup> In 1648, Leonor María was made *dama* (lady of the bedchamber) to Philip IV's new wife Mariana of Austria, whom he married by proxy in Austria the same year. As Gutiérrez Usillos notes, the girls were of a similar age and had the German language in common: a fellow Austrian, Leonor was born in Vienna.<sup>89</sup> Before the arrival of the new queen in Madrid in 1649—after a year progressing from her home via Italy to Spain—Leonor had fulfilled the role of *menina* to

85 As Mena Marqués has pointed out, Velázquez was familiar with his predecessor's work and is highly likely to have seen this particular painting in the collection of Juana's father Don Íñigo de Mendoza; *Catálogo*, 152.

86 Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey*, 219. For a precis of the painting's history, see Gutiérrez Usillos, "Mexican Portrait."

87 On the viceroy's return to Spain in 1675, he became Queen Mariana's *Mayordomo mayor* (Master of the household); Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey*, 59.

88 This association was not noted by Gutiérrez Usillos, *ibid.*

89 *Ibid.*, 34–35.

Philip's younger daughter by his first wife (Isabel of Bourbon), the Infanta María Teresa (1638–1683).<sup>90</sup> Leonor María was part of Queen Mariana's household at the same time as the dwarf Maribárbola Asquín, who was another German speaker.<sup>91</sup> Having a language in common would lend the new queen and her companions the powerful advantage of being able to communicate privately in a court where the majority spoke Spanish.<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps the decision to have Rodríguez Beltrán include a dwarf in her daughter's portrait in 1670 was a deliberate harking back to the court Leonor María knew so well. The reason behind the creation of this painting has been hypothesized as marking a change in María Luisa's status from young girl (*menina*) of around fourteen years old to either being of a marriageable age or commemorating her betrothal to Don Joseph de Silva.<sup>93</sup> Both were the type of rare and significant occasion that justified memorialization on canvas.

The painting follows the pattern for double portraits of this kind created in Spain, but departs from precedent in significant ways. The heavy curtains behind the pair—like the carpet—are luxury household furnishings and traditional framing devices. Fine perfumed gloves were familiar attributes, but the way in which María Luisa dangles the left glove from her right fingertips is “rather unsettling”: the glove's bulky shape has the appearance of a disembodied hand.<sup>94</sup> Her outfit has been characterized as an exaggerated and “baroque” version of the Spanish fashion for noble girls: a costume that served to flatten the growing chest and conceal the shape of the entire body.<sup>95</sup> The result is an unnatural outline that bears little resemblance to a human figure. As decorum decreed, other than María Luisa's face with its white skin and pink cheeks, the only body parts on view are the hands, whose smallness is exaggerated by the enormous sleeves.

The hand-on-head pose follows the pattern of denoting affection for, protection of, and dominion over the shorter person. However, it is unusual for a dwarf to be placed on the left: in Habsburg portraiture, the smaller attendant is generally placed under the right hand. Was this arrangement intended to

90 Born in 1638, María Teresa was just four years younger than her stepmother.

91 Leonor María was married in the royal chapel in 1655 and left for Mexico with her husband in 1664; *ibid.*, 35, 37.

92 The abandonment of her native language was part of a new bride's enforced “process of re-territorializing” as she left her own country to take up a role of dynastic importance in another. For an account of Mariana's journey from Austrian princess to Spanish bride and queen, see Quintero, “Spaces of Female Sovereignty,” 186–96.

93 Gutiérrez Usillos concludes that the former is more likely; *La hija del virrey*, 220, 264.

94 *Ibid.*, 243.

95 *Ibid.*, 221.



Figure 7.4 Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán, *María Luisa de Toledo with Her Indigenous Companion*, ca. 1670. Oil on canvas, 205.7 × 126.5 cm. (P003608) Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Photo: © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado.



highlight the native woman's otherness by placing her on the "sinister" side? Or was the choice made in order to make it plain that—despite the pose being associated with the Spanish royalty—María Luisa was not aspiring to royal status by mimicking a princess?<sup>96</sup> A more likely answer might be the Mexican artist's lack of familiarity with royal prototypes. Whatever the reason for this detail, the woman's dark hair sets off the requisite paleness and delicacy of María Luisa's hand.<sup>97</sup>

The dwarf's tattoos have been identified as belonging to the Chichimec, a broad group of people from the northern regions of "New Spain," many of whom were captured and enslaved.<sup>98</sup> This woman might have been seized during a campaign and presented as a gift to the viceroy, which is a distinct possibility given the contemporary value of the rare and "exotic" person or animal.<sup>99</sup> Part of her function in the household, as in the painting, was undoubtedly to represent the people and territory governed by the viceroy on behalf of the Crown. Gutiérrez Usillos has made the point that it must not have been so unusual at the time to see tattooed indigenous people in Mexico; a tattooed person with dwarfism was undoubtedly exceptional to European eyes, however.<sup>100</sup>

The dwarf woman's outfit combines native dress with contemporary European style. She wears a *huipil* (embroidered tunic) cinched at the waist in the "Spanish fashion" over a green skirt. The large sleeves are another European addition.<sup>101</sup> There are deep shadows under her skirt and María Luisa's dress, suggesting that both are wearing *chapines*. As for the posy she holds, decoding the symbolism of flowers depends very much on the context. Here, it has been suggested that they—like the copious pearls worn by María Luisa herself—are intended to convey conjugal love, purity, and other virtues fitting for a future wife.<sup>102</sup>

96 It was politically imperative for the viceroy not to appear as a challenger to the monarch he represented. Part of this was to avoid royal disapproval by ever presenting his daughter as competing with royal women; *ibid.*, 261.

97 Wiesner-Hanks outlines some of the measures employed by European women to keep their skin appropriately pale in tropical areas, as well as the acquisition of black servants to emphasize their own "fair beauty"; *Women and Gender*, 364.

98 Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey*, 267. See also Wiesner-Hanks on the experiences of some "Indigenous, enslaved, and Mixed-Race Women" in the Spanish colonies in *Women and Gender*, 354–59.

99 Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey*, 268. In 1671, the viceroy liberated the Chichimec slaves, *ibid.*, 269. For a useful survey of the experiences of both native and European women in the "Colonial World," see Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender*. The exceptional case of indigenous women with dwarfism is beyond the scope of her book.

100 On the presence of tattooed individuals, see Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey*, 293.

101 *Ibid.*, 297.

102 *Ibid.*, 304.

María Luisa took the portrait with her when, as a widow, she entered the Convent of Constantinople in Madrid in 1706 as a nun of the *velo negro y coro*, that is, one without domestic duties.<sup>103</sup> There is no evidence that her indigenous attendant came to Spain and entered the convent with her, although Gutiérrez Usillos notes that María Luisa's mother (Leonor María de Carreto) had previously arranged for a Chichimec woman to enter the Convent of San Jerónimo in Mexico City.<sup>104</sup>

Within Spain, members of the nobility may have had dwarfs in their households, but the elite–dwarf pairing in portraits was the preserve of royalty. However, this painting suggests that distance allowed the nobility of New Spain to emulate the royal family in a manner not permitted to the aristocracy at home, with the possible exception of the Mendozas.<sup>105</sup> We are left with the tantalizing question: is Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán's painting unique or are there similar pairings awaiting discovery in the vaults?

While there are few double portraits that feature individuals with disproportionate conditions, there are a number of striking individual portraits. There is no difficulty recognizing the short stature of the man in the *Portrait of a Dwarf* (ca. 1625–30), which was produced during the reign of Philip IV by Juan van der Hamen y León (1596–1631), a close contemporary of Velázquez (see figure 8.6).<sup>106</sup> It is due to the dignity of the treatment that critics have questioned whether the man was an entertainer or a nobleman who happened to be a dwarf.<sup>107</sup> William B. Jordan—who originally attributed the painting to van der Hamen—has described the figure in terms of a burlesque, although it is difficult to see evidence of any comedic intention in the somber presentation of the figure.<sup>108</sup> The fashionable green suit is

103 Ibid., 69. María Luisa had left Mexico for Spain with her father in 1674; *ibid.*, 43.

104 Her stature is not noted, which one would expect it to be if she had dwarfism because of the rarity of the condition; *ibid.*, 274–75. It is noteworthy that the Convent of San Jerónimo was also the home of another exceptional woman closely connected to the viceregal court. This is the Hieronymite nun, poet, dramatist, philosopher, and protofeminist Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–1695) who, before entering the convent, had been invited to join the court of the marquis de Mancera as a lady-in-waiting. Leonor María de Carreto became Sor Juana's patroness and friend, featuring in her poetry as “Laura”; Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey*, 37–38, 42–43.

105 See n. 83 above.

106 Unlike the Spanish description, the English-language caption says the sitter was “probably a buffoon,” therefore ignoring the other roles fulfilled by dwarfs or seeing humor in the presentation.

107 Gállego, “Manías y pequeñeces,” 23, and Mena Marqués, *Catálogo*, 28.

108 Jordan originally hypothesized that the subject might have been a “mature male dwarf” called Bartolo or Bartolillo, an identification based solely on the fact that a dwarf of this name resided at court in the 1620s; *Spanish Still Life*, 120. For Jordan's subsequent retraction, see *Juan van der Hamen y León*, 307, n. 44. The painting may have belonged to the marqués de Leganés (Diego Mexía Felípez de Guzmán, ca.1585–1655); *ibid.*, 198.

slashed to reveal flashes of red fabric beneath, and the shoes are tied with a green ribbon that has gold threads woven into it. Across his chest he wears a gold chain similar to that worn by Soplillo in the portrait by Rodrigo de Villandrando discussed above.

His bowed legs are presented unequivocally, making it clear that his body is malformed as well as being much smaller than average. At a time when scholars agreed that the ideal male body should be the equivalent of between nine and ten head heights, he is shown as being about four head heights tall.<sup>109</sup> The accentuated smallness of his feet makes the body look unharmonious, an effect that is further emphasized by the bagginess of the breeches, which almost reach his ankles. However, the man's head looks as though it is sliced from his shoulders by the fashionable starched collar. It is almost as though the aristocratic face with its neat beard and moustache and the body beneath it do not belong together. Perhaps the artist was making the point that the head—the site of reasoning—should not be compromised by a less-than-ideal body. His highly expressive face and penetrating gaze create an impression in the spectator of being under intense, thoughtful scrutiny. Mediated by the artist's vision, we have an impression of the living subject fixing us in his sights from across the centuries and asking, "Who do you think you are looking at?"

## Conclusion

I began this chapter by setting out the prevailing model whereby royalty is conceptualized as embodying the normal/ideal and dwarfs the physically anomalous. In fact, an examination of the historical and pictorial evidence shows that the situation was far more complex and interesting than this simple opposition suggests. Emperor Charles V's malformed jaw caused him mechanical problems speaking and eating, yet artists transformed the distinctive chin into a badge that marked out later generations as members of the mighty Habsburg dynasty. Artists were equally likely to play upon the dwarfs' most unusual characteristics—their petite stature and/or lack of proportion—because these were their most marvelous and valuable assets.

109 According to the royal chaplain and architect Diego de Sagredo (ca. 1490–1528), "Hombre bien proporcionado se puede llamar aquel que contiene en su alto (segun Vitruvio) diez rostros. y segun Pomponio gauricio / nueve. Pero los modernos autenticos quieren que tenga nueve y un tercio"; Cortés, *Anatomía*, 97. See Falomir Faus for the contemporary debate in Spain about how many head heights there were in the proportionate male figure; *Carolus*, 357–61.

No portrait gives us the unfiltered “truth” about a person’s appearance: any representation is dependent on a range of cultural factors including style and decorum, and is filtered through the lens of the artist and the people who commissioned the work at a particular moment in time. Peter Burke put it most succinctly when he noted that “images are neither a reflection of social reality nor a system of signs without relation to social reality, but occupy a variety of positions in between these extremes.”<sup>110</sup>

It is perhaps unsurprising that the Habsburgs sought out and enjoyed the company of people whose bodies were as uncommon as their own, and there is a certain symmetry to the fact that the dwarfs’ careers ended as abruptly as that of the family whose members they had served for so long. The rule of the Spanish Habsburgs came to an end in 1700 when Philip IV and Mariana’s son, the sickly Charles II (r. 1665–1700), died without issue, aged thirty-nine. The inevitable consequence of generations of very close consanguineous marriages was a royal family that literally bred itself out of existence.<sup>111</sup> With the Habsburgs gone from Spain, the court to which the dwarfs had belonged for two hundred years no longer existed. Happily, their portraits remain to provide us with tantalizing glimpses into their world.

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110 Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 183.

111 Nine out of eleven Spanish royal marriages made between 1516 and 1700 were between first cousins or uncles and nieces; see Alvarez, Ceballos, and Quinteiro, “Role of Inbreeding.”

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**Janet Ravenscroft** (PhD) is an independent scholar with a particular interest in the Spanish Habsburg court of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Her work centers on the complex relationship between paintings of physical and social difference and the lived experience of the people portrayed.

## 8. A Ducal Dwarf, Military Prowess, and a Portrait in the Farnese Dynastic Collection

*Robin O'Bryan*

### Abstract

A portrait painted by the Flemish artist Johann Gersmueter in 1606 purports to depict “Giangiovetta,” a dwarf associated with the Farnese ducal court in Parma. Arguing that the sitter—who presents as a well-dressed courtier outfitted with martial accouterments—does not appear to be what would be deemed a “proportionate” dwarf, this essay reviews the extant inventory records and the Farnese tradition for court dwarfs to ascertain how and why the figure was determined to be a dwarf. As well as considering the painting in relation to other works of dwarf imagery, the discussion proposes a possible scenario that addresses the sitter’s presumed dwarf identity, concluding that the portrait was actually that of a favored military official in ducal employ.

**Keywords:** proportionate dwarfism, Giangiovetta, Johann Gersmueter, chivalric attributes, Paolo Rinaldi, inventories

A little-known painting formerly in Farnese holdings and now in the Galleria Nazionale in Parma has been identified as the portrait of “Giangiovetta,” a dwarf affiliated with the Farnese ducal court (figure 8.1).<sup>1</sup> The work was

<sup>1</sup> Held in the museum’s storage for years, the painting was brought to light as part of the exhibition *The Farnese. Architecture, Art, Power*, held at the Pilotta complex in Parma (March 18–July 31, 2022). The Farnese were a powerful dynasty operating in Italy whose family members included Pope Paul III (r. 1534–49), important cardinals, and the dukes who ruled Parma and Piacenza from 1545 to 1731.



Figure 8.1 Johann Gersmueter, *Portrait of the Dwarf Giangiovetta* (alleged), 1606. Oil on canvas, 159 × 115 cm. Galleria Nazionale di Parma. Photo: Complessa Monumentale della Pilotta – Galleria Nazionale di Parma.

executed in 1606 by the Flemish painter Johann Gersmueter, who produced two other portraits around the same time for Ranuccio Farnese, then ruling as duke of Parma and Piacenza (r. 1592–1622). Although precise records pertaining to the commissioning of the “Giangiovetta” portrait are not extant, in an article published in 1992, Giuseppe Bertini traced the work

to inventories made in 1641 and 1653 at the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, which cited a “Giovangiovetta” by name.<sup>2</sup> Using the shortened version of the name as it subsequently appeared in the 1680 inventory, Bertini then linked “Giangiovetta” to the dwarf Giovanni Gioietta, referenced in court documents for 1597 and 1599, thus leading him to confirm the identity of the sitter in Gersmueter’s painting.<sup>3</sup> The validity—and scholarly acceptance—of this assessment notwithstanding, viewers might be hard-pressed to see in the portrait the figure of a dwarf, much less one who would have been deemed “proportionate.”<sup>4</sup>

Taking Bertini’s article as a point of departure, this essay advances a new interpretation of the work known officially as the *Ritratto del nano Giangiovetta* (Portrait of the Dwarf Giangiovetta).<sup>5</sup> Rather than accept the inventory records at face value, the investigation probes deeper, reexamining the historical circumstances to ascertain how and why the sitter was determined to be a dwarf. While situating the portrait within the period vogue for dwarfs and dwarf imagery, particularly as pertains to Farnese dynastic traditions, the discussion also considers the work in relation to other portraits of court dwarfs painted around the same time. A key part of this analysis focuses attention on Gersmueter’s iconography, finding special significance in the figure’s items of apparel and the objects that accompany him in the composition. As I argue, the sum total of this analytical approach provides ample grounds for challenging the identity of the sitter and his designation as a Farnese court dwarf.

2 Specifically, Bertini tied the inventory record to a wax seal inscribed with the number 431 and a shield motif with a *fleur-de-lis* that at some point was affixed to the back of the painting. The 1653 inventory specifies “un quadro in tela senze cornice col retratto in piedi di Giovangiovetta nano del Duca Alessandro”; Bertini, *La Galleria del Duca di Parma*, inv. 422, p. 217, and see next note.

3 Although Bertini used the “Giovangiovetta” spelling in his 1987 *La Galleria del Duca*, in his 1992 article he quoted the prior inventory records using the shortened 1680 “Giangiovetta” spelling, the name by which the portrait has come to be known; “Johann Gersmueter’s Portrait of a Dwarf,” n. 9; and see discussion below.

4 The Mayo Clinic (“Dwarfism”) defines proportionate dwarfism as when “all parts of the body are small to the same degree and appear to be proportioned like a body of average stature.”

5 As well as the museum’s website (Pilotta, “Ritratto del nano Giangiovetta,” and “Johann Gersmueter”), this designation has been accepted by scholars including Béguin, Lavagetto, Le Breton, and Marconi, whose remarks are included in this essay. It should be noted that in his 1939 publication on the museum holdings, the art historian Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle identified the painting as a *ritratto di gentilumo* (portrait of a gentleman); *La Regia Galleria di Parma*, 326.

## Issues of Provenance

Measuring over five feet tall and almost four feet wide, the portrait shows an elegantly dressed older gentleman standing by a table in a room with classical architectural fittings. He has short-cropped light brown hair and mustache, and a visage that betrays his advancing years. Appropriate to asserting his elevated social rank and presumed affiliation with the ducal court, he wears lavish brocade breeches, a gold waistcoat, and an elaborate lace ruff; at his hip is the ornamental hilt of a rapier, a standard accouterment for courtiers. With his right arm akimbo, he stretches out his left arm to rest his hand on a pair of gloves lying on the table next to a book—other signifiers of elite status. By the gloves is a red scarf with gold embroidery that has been draped artfully over the table's edge, the scarf's gold trim picked up in the fringe of the tablecloth. Behind and above the table is a shelf holding a vase of flowers, while on the wooden panel directly below, the artist placed his signature and the date of execution, April 1606.<sup>6</sup>

The notation with Gersmueter's name and date allowed scholars to connect the painting to the two other portraits that were ordered by Duke Ranuccio, for which payments to a *pictor fiamengo* (Flemish painter) named "Giovani Gersementor" were recorded in June of that year.<sup>7</sup> However, although those documents would ostensibly substantiate Gersmueter's activity at the Farnese court in Parma, they do not specify that Ranuccio paid for the portrait assumed to be that of Giangiovetta—nor that he had initiated the commission. Complicating the question of patronage, documentary references to the portrait are beset by inaccuracies and inconsistencies, exacerbated in part by the transfer of the work from Parma to Rome and back again (and not helped by the loss of the Farnese archives during the Second World War).<sup>8</sup> The first mention of the portrait in the 1641 and 1653 inventories conducted in Rome ascribed the dwarf to Ranuccio's father Duke Alessandro Farnese (1545–1592).<sup>9</sup> In 1680, by which time the painting had been sent back to Parma to be installed in the Farnese Palazzo del Giardino, the compiler of the inventory seems to have been tentative in his acceptance

6 "IOES GERMVETER ME FE. A<sup>o</sup>. 1606. P<sup>o</sup>. APR.," cited in Ricci, *Galleria Nazionale*, 254.

7 Specifically, payments were made for a portrait of the duke's brother Cardinal Odoardo Farnese and the other for Ranuccio's close friend Francesco Zobili; Bertini, "Johann Gersmueter's Portrait of a Dwarf." Also see Béguin, "Johann Gersmueter," 200.

8 The Farnese records in Parma were moved to Naples in the eighteenth century, with a large cache destroyed by German forces in 1943.

9 See citation in n. 2 above. Alessandro served as duke of Parma and Piacenza (r. 1586–92) and as governor general of the Spanish Netherlands (r. 1578–92).

that Giangiovetta was represented, writing *si dice essere Giangiovetto. (sic)* (it is said to be Giangiovetto. (sic)), and attributing the portrait to the Parmese artist Alessandro Mazzola.<sup>10</sup>

Fast forward to 1865 when the painting entered its permanent home in the Galleria Nazionale, it was described simply as the *Ritratto d'un nano buffone di Corte* (portrait of a dwarf buffoon of the court) and attributed to Alessandro Mazzola's father Girolamo (who had died in 1569).<sup>11</sup> Three decades later, in the guidebook to the museum's holdings, the art historian Corrado Ricci confirmed Gersmueter's authorship, acknowledging the traditional designation of the sitter as "a dwarf who lived in the court of Ranuccio I Farnese," and similarly eliminating the dwarf's name.<sup>12</sup> Notably, however, while his description now associated the unnamed "dwarf" with Ranuccio instead of his father Alessandro, more significant for our purposes is Ricci's reference to the subject as *un gentiluomo* (a gentleman) and expressing his doubt that a dwarf was even represented.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing the numerous errors that have crept into the record in the years since the portrait was executed, we would be justified in questioning why the "Giangiovetta nano" designation has been singled out and accepted as fact.<sup>14</sup> This is especially

10 Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventarii inediti*, 252. Notably, the entry also gave incorrect measurements to indicate that the work was square. And see n. 14 below.

11 In 1820 the painting was temporarily relocated to the Accademia di Belle Arti, also in Parma; Bertini, "Johann Gersmueter's Portrait of a Dwarf," and his n. 6. In Francesco Gandini's 1834 *Viaggi in Italia*, Gersmueter was once again given as the artist and the sitter identified as a dwarf, but the description now focused on his attire to connect him to the Farnese court ("Il Ritratto di un Nano, che all'abito pare appartenere alla Corte Farnese"); 64. Girolamo Mazzola had painted an allegorical portrait of *Parma Embracing Alessandro Farnese* in 1556 (also now housed in the Galleria Nazionale in Parma).

12 [...] "un nano che viveva alla Corte di Ranuccio I Farnese"; Ricci, *Galleria Nazionale*, 253–54.

13 "Saremmo curiosi di sapere quali argomenti hanno indotto a vedero, in questo ritratto, un nano, vissuto per giunta con Ranuccio I Farnese"; *ibid.*

14 Since the 1680 inventory contains incorrect information with regard to the artist and the painting's measurements as well (Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi*, 252), I would have to disagree with Bertini's assertion that the evidence of the inventories which identifies the sitter as a court dwarf must be "unreservedly accepted"; "Johann Gersmueter's Portrait of a Dwarf." Le Cannu was less accepting of the reliability of the Farnese inventories, allowing that a significant number of works in the collection cannot be identified due to the lack of detailed archival data, including indications of when the works actually entered the collection and the rather vague descriptions that often err on the side of terseness; "Les tableaux," 369. Duly relevant is Robertson's observation that "inventories are frequently vague in their descriptions or inaccurate in their attributions [with such] misattributions handed down from one inventory to another," cautioning more pointedly that the inventories of the Farnese collection "are not always trustworthy"; see, respectively, "Review of Giuseppe Bertini, *La Galleria del Duca di Parma*," 109–10, and "Artistic Patronage of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese," 367. Also see nn. 45, 46 below.

puzzling since the inventory records identifying him by name were compiled over thirty to forty years after the portrait was painted—not in Parma where the painting originated, but at the Palazzo Farnese in Rome where different institutional memory was at work—and where the dwarf called Gi[ov]angiovetta is not known to have resided.

## The Vogue for Dwarfs and Dwarf Imagery

Like their noble peers, the Farnese had responded to the contemporary fashion for dwarfs, employing them in their courts and having this princely icon represented in their commissioned works of art.<sup>15</sup> *Il Gran Cardinale* Alessandro Farnese (1520–1589) had at least three dwarfs in his entourage, including Taddeo del Forno, nicknamed Rodomonte after the Saracen king in the epic Orlando poems by Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto.<sup>16</sup> Given his close association with the cardinal, with whom he served for almost fifty years, it may be Rodomonte himself who was represented in the Farnese villa in Caprarola outside Rome. Jacopo Bertoia's fresco in the Sala degli Angeli from 1572 portrays the life-size figure of a dwarf, his visage now effaced, standing next to a dog in an illusionistic doorway; another dwarf (perhaps also Rodomonte) was included in Antonio Tempesta's grotesque decoration painted on the wall of the stairway in 1579–81.<sup>17</sup> Yet another dwarf associated with the cardinal's patronage was depicted by Baldassare Croce in a fresco for the Oratory of the Most Holy Cross in Rome in 1583–85.<sup>18</sup> Adhering to family precedent, Alessandro's grand-nephew Cardinal Odoardo Farnese (1573–1626) had a dwarf called Amon (not to be

15 I examine this vogue in O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delights."

16 Also in the cardinal's employ were the dwarfs Decolin Nano and Francesco Coleman; Zapperi, *Un buffone e un nano*, 71. Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (Orlando in Love) was published in 1483, followed by Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (The Frenzy of Orlando, literally Mad Orlando), first published in 1516.

17 The dwarf's face in Bertoia's fresco was later erased likely in an act of "pious vandalism." I thank Greger Sundin for bringing Tempesta's dwarf to my attention. In addition to the Caprarola dwarfs, well before this project in 1546 the Croatian artist Giulio Clovio had portrayed a dwarf (meant to be a pun on the artist himself) in a book of hours commissioned by Alessandro; see discussion by Voelkle, "The Farnese Hours," 35. The manuscript (Ms M. 69) is now housed in the Morgan Library & Museum.

18 Alessandro served as cardinal protector of the archconfraternity that gave the oratory its name. The dwarf, who appears in the fresco depicting the *Approval of the Laws of the Confraternity*, is described by Fagiolo as *un nano vestito da paggio* (a dwarf dressed as a page); "Le storie dell'Arciconfraternita," 328.



Figure 8.2 Agostino Carracci, *Arrigo Peloso, Pietro Matto, and Amon Nano*, ca. 1598–1600. Oil on canvas, 101 × 133 cm. Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. Photo: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali/Art Resource, NY.

confused with Rodomonte), who was portrayed together with the hirsute Arrigo Peloso (a “gift” to Odoardo from Duke Ranuccio), the fool Pietro Matto, dogs, monkeys, and a parrot in Agostino Carracci’s portrait of the ensemble painted 1598–1600 (figure 8.2).<sup>19</sup> In 1608 Odoardo went on to commission Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri) to paint frescoes in the Chapel of the Founders in the Abbey of Grottaferrata near Rome, which likewise contains a noticeable dwarf figure.<sup>20</sup>

Back in Parma, dwarf imagery was also produced for the Farnese dukes in the dynastic Palazzo del Giardino.<sup>21</sup> Shortly after the palace was constructed

19 Scholars have often perpetuated the mistaken notion that “Amon” was a diminutive of “Rodomonte” and therefore Rodomonte was the dwarf depicted in the portrait. However, not only was Amon another character in the Orlando poems (Amon was the father of Rinaldo, one of Charlemagne’s chief paladins), but Cardinal Alessandro’s Rodomonte—who entered his service around 1540—would have been at least sixty to seventy years old at the time this work was painted, and the dwarf in the Carracci portrait is clearly much younger.

20 The dwarf is shown in the scene of the *Meeting of St. Nilus and Otto III*; on the project, see Spear, *Domenichino*, 1:159–62.

21 I thank the Carabinieri staff, Segreteria del Comandante Fabio Bonzanini, and Lieutenant Colonel Andrea Pacchiarotti, for facilitating my visit and escorting me to view the frescoes in the palazzo, which now houses Parma’s Provincial Carabinieri Command.





Figure 8.3 Giovan Battista Trotti (il Malosso), detail of dwarf from *The Sacrifice of Alcesti*, 1604. Fresco, Sala di Malosso, Palazzo del Giardino, Parma. Photo: By permission of the Municipality of Parma – S.O. Museum System.

in 1561 by Ranuccio's grandfather Duke Ottavio Farnese (r. 1547–86), he enlisted Bertoia and Girolamo Mirola to paint the decorative schemes, with Bertoia depicting a comical-looking dwarf sporting a straggly beard and a lascivious grin on the vault of a room illustrating scenes from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.<sup>22</sup> Several decades later, under Ranuccio's patronage in 1604, the artist Giovan Battista Trotti (called il Malosso) included a dwarf in his fresco of *The Sacrifice of Alcesti* in the eponymous Sala di Malosso.<sup>23</sup> The dwarf is dressed in an exotic blue and rose-colored costume with matching headgear, his head shown in profile with just a hint of red hair emerging from his cap (figure 8.3). Although a door subsequently cut into the wall prevents us from getting an exact reading of his physique, the ratio of his

22 The section of the vault with the dwarf depicts an episode from Ariosto's seventh canto, showing Ruggiero and Alcina leaving for the hunt. The dwarf sports a parrot or falcon on his fist, a popular convention in Italian dwarf imagery. He appears in the lower right-hand corner of the vault, viewable at: <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/hall-of-ariosto/PgKyKzvJkHm8Ig>.

23 The full fresco is viewable at: [https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/malosso-hall/\\_gF-mA2KIk4umeQ](https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/malosso-hall/_gF-mA2KIk4umeQ).

oversized head to his body makes obvious his dwarfish stature, while his facial features (he has a prominent chin and full lips) read as portraiture. Given the verisimilitude with which the dwarf's visage has been rendered, we might reasonably wonder whether the artist has portrayed an actual dwarf residing in the ducal court. Could this be the "real" Giovanni Gioietta?

It is not known when this dwarf came into Farnese service, although he was certainly in residence by 1597 since court documents for that year and for 1599 record clothing expenses "for the dwarf Giovanni Gioietta."<sup>24</sup> The name "Gio' Gioietta" subsequently appears in the court registry for 1613 in connection with payment for his duties as *aiutante di camera* (similar to a valet-de-chambre), and in a list of salaried employees a year or so thereafter.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, in a Parmese document from 1604 the dwarf's name is also cited, the record indicating that "Gio. Gioietta" dispensed funds to another Farnese court artist for a project in the Jesuit college in Piacenza.<sup>26</sup> That the dwarf was assigned the task of doling out the money (*per mano*) suggests that the funding came directly from the Farnese duke, the task at hand—as well as his duties as *aiutante di camera*—duly indicating that the dwarf played an important role in Ranuccio's household. However, while these documents would confirm the presence of the dwarf called Giovanni Gioietta in the ducal court, they make no specific mention of the Gi[ov]angiovetta cited in the inventory record, a disparity that may be of special significance.

As noted earlier, Bertini linked the two names to support his claim that Giangiovetta was the individual depicted in Gersmueter's 1606 portrait, but the difference in spelling, however slight, may be grounds for questioning their presumed shared identity. Both sobriquets are variants of Giovanni (John) and employ the suffix *-etta* indicating "something little," but they actually have different meanings. Giovanni Gioietta may be translated as "Little Joyful John," the "Gioietta" deriving from *gioia* (joy), with Giangiovetta roughly translated as "Young John," from *giovanetto* (boy)—or *giovanetta* meaning young girl. In this respect it is worth considering that Gi[ov]angiovetta may have possibly referred to another John altogether,

24 Referenced in Bertini, "Johann Gersmueter's Portrait of a Dwarf," 179.

25 See Lavagetto, "Johann Gersmueter," 282.

26 "A di 13 d'8bre 1604 in Parma Confesso io Giovanni Sonns [Jan Soens] havere hauto dal G. Girolamo Lamberti per mano del Sig. Gio. Gioietta vinti ducatonì [...]" cited in Béguin, "An Unpublished Drawing by Jan Soens," 278. The use of "Sig.[nore]" preceding the dwarf's name was not unusual as other dwarfs were sometimes referenced this way; see, for example, the document citing Cardinal Alessandro Farnese's dwarf Francesco Colem, in Zapperi, *Un buffone e un nano*, 71. Duke Ranuccio had founded a university in Parma in 1601 in association with the Order, thus continuing Farnese traditional support of Jesuit initiatives and their projects.

perhaps the dwarf Johannem who was mentioned in connection with Ranuccio's father in 1592. At the time, Duke Alessandro (*il Gran Capitano*) was in the employ of his uncle Philip II of Spain (r. 1556–98), where he had spent the last several years commanding troops and acting as governor general of the Netherlands. The dwarf was later described by the Swiss doctor Felix Platter (Plater) in his *Observationum* published in 1614. As Platter recalled, "I saw the ... Dwarfe called John [Johannem] Estrix of Mechlin, brought from Basil to the Duke of Parma in Flanders, in November [1592]. He was thirty five years old, and was but three foot long, and had a long beard. He could not go up a pair of stairs, nor into a chair, but was lifted up by his servant. He had three languages, and was very ingenious and industrious. I once played with him at Dice."<sup>27</sup> Given this description, if the nickname Giovangiovetta was assigned to Johannem, it would have been an appropriate jest considering that the incapacitated thirty-five-year-old dwarf with the long beard was clearly not a "young boy" (nor for that matter, a "young girl").

Of course, Platter's recollection is not enough to confirm that Johannem was actually in service to Alessandro, nor does it prove that Johannem was called Giovangiovetta (or even Giangiovetta); it may, however, give us pause in automatically accepting the premise that Gi[ov]angiovetta and Giovanni Gioietta were the same person.<sup>28</sup> Worth noting, too, is that in addition to the above-cited records that connect Giovanni Gioietta only to Ranuccio, the initial inventory entries mentioned the dwarf in connection with his father *Alessandro*. The deviations in the written record notwithstanding, based on Platter's description of Johannem's pronounced physical disabilities—and his inability to even stand—it is patently clear that Johannem is not the individual represented in Gersmueter's portrait.<sup>29</sup> Assuming the accuracy of the artist's rendering of the figure identified as "the dwarf Giangiovetta" whose dwarfism is not even evident, the painting thus would represent a significant departure from the other works of dwarf imagery commissioned

27 The original text in Latin refers to him as "Johannem de Estrix"; Plater [Platter], *Observationum*, 563–64, with translation from Katritzky, *Healing, Performance and Ceremony*, 203. Johannem serves as another example of a dwarf who may be considered verifiably "disabled"; see nn. 77–78 in the Introduction to this volume, and O'Bryan, "Able-bodied and Disabled Dwarfs in Italian Renaissance Imagery," especially 173–79.

28 Shortly before Alessandro died in early December 1592 in Arras after suffering wounds in battle, he had called Ranuccio to Flanders to assume control of his command. It is not known if said Johannem followed Rancuccio to the court in Parma.

29 His extreme deformation would have duly prevented Johannem from performing the duties of *aiutante di camera*.

by the Farnese. This is of particular importance since it was a large singular portrait, not a group portrait or a fresco where the dwarf was part of a larger pictorial ensemble. Then again, as Corrado Ricci was keenly aware in his evaluation of the portrait in 1896, the visual evidence does not support interpreting the figure as a dwarf.

## Proportionate Dwarfs

Indeed, nothing about the way Gersmueter has portrayed the sitter indicates that he is other than a regular-sized man, neither tall nor particularly short. The notion that the artist “idealized” the dwarf’s features and “ingeniously disguised” his deformity by adjusting the architectural features to give him a “normal appearance” is simply not plausible.<sup>30</sup> This is an important point since it was the very nature of the dwarfs’ unusual physiques—whether it be their miniaturized bodies and/or their obvious anatomical abnormalities—that made them desirable and *distinctive* subjects in princely imagery, indeed such as seen in the other works produced for the Farnese cardinals and dukes.<sup>31</sup> More to the point, although early modern European imagery often showed court dwarfs accompanying their patrons or appearing together with other figures and animals in a variety of scenarios, even when they were represented alone there was typically some distinguishing feature(s) to set them apart, if not their conspicuous physical differences then special accouterments or aspects of dress.<sup>32</sup> For those proportionate dwarfs such as Jeffrey Hudson who might be mistaken for children when they were portrayed as singular subjects unto themselves (see figure I.1), their status as bona fide dwarfs has been well confirmed by court records and by contemporary accounts. In the case of the figure identified as Gi[ov]angiovetta in the Farnese inventories, however, since there are no extant documents detailing the commissioning and execution of the portrait,

30 Béguin, “Johann Gersmueter,” 200; and Le Breton, *I dipinti fiamminghi*, 68.

31 See my discussion on court dwarfs in O’Byan, “Grotesque Bodies, Princely Prestige.”

32 For example, figures might be shown whose facial features were characteristic of achondroplasia, the most common form of dwarfism. Manifested by a large forehead and an indentation in the bridge of the nose, other physical features include a normal-sized trunk and short arms, legs, hands, and feet. Dwarfs were also depicted wearing jester’s or fool’s clothing or were juxtaposed with monkeys, birds, and/or dogs, their typical companions in much Italian Renaissance imagery, indeed such as accompany the dwarf in Anthonis Mor’s portrait (see figure I.2), and Amon in the group portrait by Agostino Carracci (figure 8.2).

again we have to question how it was determined that a *dwarf* had been represented in the first place.

A look back at contemporary events in Rome may provide a tentative clue. In June 1633, Charles de Créqui, duc de Lesdiguières and ambassador from the French royal court to the Holy See, made a grand entry into Rome accompanied by an entourage of sixteen lavishly dressed pages and a dwarf, who led the procession on horseback.<sup>33</sup> The dwarf was subsequently to be seen making appearances as part of the duke's official protocol, which attracted the attention of period chroniclers. One account described him as "the marvel (*maraviglia*) of all Rome as much for the smallness of his stature, as for the perfect proportions of his limbs," with another offering that "he was noteworthy for having gracefully proportionate limbs," and a third remarking that "he was the smallest and his features were the best proportioned that had even been seen."<sup>34</sup> (Note the continual emphasis on "proportion.") So remarkable was his miniaturized physique that he was portrayed in a portrait presented as a gift to Pope Urban VIII's nephew Cardinal Francesco Barberini later that year.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, although the portrait itself was lost, Barry Wind has proposed that it served as the basis for the woodcut appearing in Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum Historia* (History of Monsters) published in 1642.<sup>36</sup> Entitled *Nanus Illustrissimi D. Ducis Caroli de Creqy* (Dwarf of the Most Illustrious Duke Caroli de Creqy), the rudimentary rendering portrays the dwarf identified in the text as Michael

33 De Créqui, served as Louis XIII's ambassador extraordinary to Pope Urban VIII. A contemporary account gave special attention to the clothing worn by the pages and the dwarf; see Lavin and Aronberg Lavin, "Duquesnoy's 'Nano di Créqui,'" 133 with Italian original at n. 9.

34 [...] "che rendeva non men maraviglia à tutta Roma per la piccolezza della statura, che per la proportione così perfetta de' membrij"; "il qual Nano era riguardevole per esser di membra gratiosamente proportionate"; "che è il più piccolo, e di fattezze più proportionate, che si sia veduto"; *ibid.*, 133, nn. 10, 11, 12.

35 The gift was presumably presented by the duke himself. The work was described in the Barberini palace inventory in 1649 as "Un quadro senza Cornice figura in tela il Nano di Monsu di Chirichi alto palmi cinque e large tre palmi [112 × 67 cm] in circa"; *ibid.*, 133 n. 16. Attention is also directed to the seventeenth-century portrait labeled "Nano di corte" now in the Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Reale in Pisa. Attributed to an unknown Tuscan artist, the figure has been identified as the "Nano del duca di Crequit," although the smaller dimensions and inferior quality of the craftsmanship of the painting would indicate that this is not the same portrait presented to the Barberini cardinal. Notably, on the back of the canvas at least seven different inventory numbers have been inscribed (including one assigned immediately following the Second World War), which has obvious implications for the difficulty of using such records for identification purposes (see n. 2 above). The image is illustrated and discussed in *Catalogo generale dei Beni Culturali*, "Nano di corte."

36 Wind, *Foul and Pestilent Congregation*, 26; and Aldrovandi, *Monstrorum Historia*, 39–40.



Figure 8.4 Ulisse Aldrovandi, "Nanus Illustrissimi D. Ducis Caroli de Crey," from *Monstrorum historia*, 1642. Artwork in the public domain.

Magnanus, the artist having adopted the prevailing convention used in contemporary portraiture (figure 8.4).<sup>37</sup> The dwarf has been situated next to a table (this one also covered in a fringed tablecloth), his one arm akimbo and the other outstretched to rest his hand on the table surface. Dressed in expensive brocade attire, the dwarf wears breeches and a waistcoat that is parted in the front; at his side the hilt of a rapier is visible. Remembering that prints are a reverse of the original, we may see a ready resemblance in the manner in which Gersmueter's figure and the de Créqui dwarf have been represented, the similarities assuredly more striking when the "Giangiovetta" portrait was compared with the lost painted original.

Since the Farnese officials in Rome were operating in the same elite circles as the Barberini, it is not a stretch to think that some of them would have seen the portrait of de Créqui's dwarf housed in the Barberini palace only

37 Here we might note that the name was likely meant to be a pun conflating *magnifico* (magnificent) with *nanus* (dwarf).

a short walk away from the Palazzo Farnese.<sup>38</sup> They may also have been among those accompanying Duke Odoardo I (1612–1646), Ranuccio's son and successor, when he came from Parma to Rome on a diplomatic visit in late 1639.<sup>39</sup> Greeted with great fanfare, Odoardo was entertained and escorted around the city by Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who presented him with paintings—and likely took him to view his own famous collection where the portrait of de Créquy's extraordinary dwarf would have been on display.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps this image of the renowned dwarf prompted a reciprocal response in the competitive Farnese duke, leading him to recall the dwarfs in his grandfather's and father's service, and recounting his memories to the officials back at the palazzo where he stayed during the course of his Roman visit.<sup>41</sup> Having been a small child when the dwarf Giovanni Gioietta was in residence at the palace in Parma, Odoardo may even have mentioned him by name, his court attendants duly taking note.

Let us then imagine the situation confronting the Farnese officials less than two years later when it came time to identify the portrait by Gersmueter

38 The position of *maestro di guardaroba*, the term denoting the official overseeing the princely collection, was typically assigned to courtiers, members of the aristocracy who were well-versed in the arts and even patrons themselves; their elite status would have had them operating in the same circles as the Barberini. The two Farnese officials conducting the inventories in 1641 and 1653 inventories who held that position have been identified as Bartolomeo Faini and Innocenzo Sacchi. Although focusing on the Medici dukes, Freddolini provides a good overview of the role and status of the *maestro di guardaroba* in "Grand Dukes and Their Inventories," 1–4; and see Furlotti, "Evidence," 25.

39 Ten-year-old Odoardo had become duke upon his father's death in 1622, but his uncle Cardinal Odoardo served as regent until his own passing four years later.

40 The Barberini cardinal would have been anxious to show off Pietro da Cortona's grand illusionistic fresco *Allegory of Divine Providence (Triumph of the Barberini)* finished that same year (which contains giants), in order to impress the visiting duke and perhaps upstage Annibale Carracci's *Love of the Gods* (1597–1601) commissioned by Cardinal Odoardo for the Palazzo Farnese. Duke Odoardo may have also been shown the small portrait bust of the de Créquy dwarf by François Duquesnoy that was in the collection of Francesco's brother Cardinal Antonio Barberini. On the bust, which was recorded in Antonio's inventory of 1644, see *Catalogo generale dei Beni Culturali*, "Nano di corte"; and Lavin and Lavin, "Duquesnoy's 'Nano di Créquy,'" 133.

41 Duke Odoardo was in a dispute with the Barberini over the issue of precedence—and thus preeminence (a matter of grave importance for Renaissance princes)—believing them to be inferior to the Farnese. During his almost three-month stay, he behaved poorly, departing Rome without taking the paintings given him by the Barberini cardinals, and committing a breach of protocol with other actions toward them. These diplomatic infractions and Odoardo's financial woes put him in bad stead with their uncle Pope Urban VIII, whose papal forces took hold of the duchy of Castro (ruled by the Farnese) in October 1641. Shortly thereafter, in January 1642, the pope excommunicated Odoardo and seized Farnese possessions and their palace in Rome, which ultimately led to the War of Castro (1642–44). The impending threat of war seems to have been the impetus for drawing up the Palazzo Farnese inventory; Le Canu, "Les tableaux," 371.

in the palazzo's holdings—one of the 600-plus paintings that had to be inventoried.<sup>42</sup> Since there are no obvious clues to indicate that a dwarf has been represented, it would make perfect sense for the compilers to draw on recent experience, turning to other works of art with which to render their judgment. Finding compositional similarities between the portrait and that of the de Créquy dwarf in the Barberini gallery, and bolstered by knowledge of the previous dwarfs in Farnese employ and their representation in dynastic imagery (if not taking a verbal cue from Duke Odoardo), the official(s) composing the inventory seem to have “logically” concluded that Gersmueter had depicted a similarly proportionate dwarf, whom they then identified as “Giovangiovetta.”<sup>43</sup> While we can only speculate on the rationale for assigning the dwarf designation to the Gersmueter portrait, it must be stressed here that given the public attention that the duc de Créquy's dwarf received for his proportionate stature—a rare physical characteristic that was highly valued as evidenced in the writings of chroniclers and in epistolary accounts—had any of the Farnese dukes or cardinals employed a dwarf of similar stature, there would surely have been some type of contemporary acknowledgement, if not in the court's records, then at the very least in other period writings.<sup>44</sup> That said, what we lack in documentary evidence can be more than compensated by what the portrait itself tells us.

## Military Prowess and Chivalric Dwarfs

Notwithstanding the (un)reliability of the inventory records to provide an accurate identification of the individual depicted in Gersmueter's portrait, a close analysis of the iconography permits us to reevaluate the dwarf

42 Ibid., 369.

43 As concerns the language used for the inventory record, while contemporary writings made specific reference to the rare proportionate dwarfs, inventories used the generic *nano* for all citations, making no distinction between those dwarfs who would have been deemed proportionate (such as evidenced in n. 35 above).

44 The most famous account of a proportionate dwarf was that by Matthew of Paris writing about the dwarf (which he referred to as a *prodigium*) of Eleanor of Provence in 1249, but in the sixteenth century the dwarf Gradasso in the court of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici was cited by name for his proportionate stature in a 1560 publication by Benedetto Varchi at the Accademia Fiorentina; see O'Bryan, “Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf,” 86. Written accounts also give descriptions of the proportionate dwarfs in the Spanish courts, including Sebastián de Covarrubias's reference in 1611 to Philip II's dwarf Estanislao as *bien proporcionado*; *Tesoro de la lengua*, 346. Also see the Introduction to this volume for other examples.



designation.<sup>45</sup> As is readily apparent, Gersmueter paid fastidious attention to delineating the sitter's extravagant costume, aspects of apparel that were expounded upon by the Parmese court official(s) when composing the lengthy entry in the 1680 inventory.<sup>46</sup> Among the items of dress cited were the figure's *calzoni di brocato alla vallona* (brocade breeches in the style of Walloon [Flanders]), the *frappa al collo* (lace ruff), and the *goletta da capitano*, which refers to the gorget, the black and gold armored collar undergirding his elaborate neck ruff.<sup>47</sup> Described as the "perfect accessory to display military prowess," the gorget enabled the wearer to "combine armor with civilian dress" and still maintain the outward appearance of a fashionable ensemble.<sup>48</sup> As well as the rapier at his side (*la spada al fianco*), further martial allusions are indicated by the bright red scarf with gold lace (*una scarpa rossa con pizzi d'oro*) that has been given special attention draped across the table, assigned more prominence yet by "Giangiovetta's" hand resting upon the nearby gloves, its fingers literally pointing to and touching the scarf. Frequently worn by military commanders, the red scarf seems to have been a more specific invocation of Duke Alessandro, who was portrayed with such a scarf in several portraits before his death.<sup>49</sup> For the Farnese court official(s) composing the inventory record and accepting that the sitter in Gersmueter's portrait was Alessandro's dwarf attendant, the inclusion of these martial attributes would have been viewed as appropriate homage.<sup>50</sup>

Setting aside for a moment this possible expression of allegiance to the Farnese duke, it is instructive to consider the "Giangiovetta" portrait within

45 This approach bears on the question posed by Freddolini and Helmreich, i.e., "is the provenance or attribution of an artifact *always* the only—and right—question to ask when reading an inventory or catalog?"; "Inventories, Catalogues and Art Historiography," 1–2. Surprisingly, subjecting Gersmueter's portrait to a rigorous iconographic analysis has generated little scholarly interest. Béguin, for example, does mention the figure's clothing and the vase with flowers, but only generally in relation to Gersmueter's attention to detail; "Johann Gersmueter," 201.

46 Of note, this is the same inventory record that seemed to question the sitter's identity (*si dice essere Giangiovetto. (sic)*), while attributing the work to Alessandro Mazzola and giving the wrong measurements. The full description appears in Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventarii inediti*, 252.

47 The definition for the *goletta*/gorget is contained in Florio, *Queen Anna's New World of Words*, 215.

48 Downing, *Fashion in the Time of William Shakespeare* (unpaginated, but using search term "gorget").

49 Portraits of Alessandro produced in 1585–90 show him with a similar scarf draped across his chest or wrapped around his arm.

50 If veneration was deemed to be at work here, the official(s) may have found an apt model in Anthonis Mor and Alonso Sánchez Coello's portrait of Alessandro housed in the Farnese collection (illustrated in Christie's, "Anthonis Mor").

the European tradition for equipping dwarfs with chivalric and military accouterments. The romance genre had popularized the character of dwarf knights and squires, which inspired medieval and early modern courts to have armor made for their dwarfs to appear in chivalric-inspired events.<sup>51</sup> In turn, the legends had a marked impact upon how dwarfs were represented in art, with generic dwarf figures portrayed with noble swords to grant them a modicum of nobility—and set them apart from the “pedestrian” dwarfs depicted as popular festival figures or itinerant entertainers. By the sixteenth century, this conceit had extended to portraiture, with princely patrons having their court dwarfs shown with chivalric attributes such as swords, and with gold chains, some terminating in a medallion that might suggest an affiliation with a military order.<sup>52</sup> (That gold necklaces were a popular sartorial adornment for dwarfs is evidenced by Duc de Créqui’s dwarf having been presented with an expensive gold necklace during the celebrated visit to Rome.<sup>53</sup>) Anthonis Mor’s portrait (ca. 1549–60), traditionally identified as the dwarf of Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517–1586) or of Emperor Charles V (r. 1519–56) or his son Philip II, shows the dwarf with a gold chain and the requisite sword/rapier at his hip (see figure 1.2).<sup>54</sup> At the court in Innsbruck, Charles V’s nephew Archduke Ferdinand II (r. 1564–95) had his proportionate dwarf Thome[r]le portrayed as a miniature knight in a portrait attributed to the court artist Francesco Terzio (ca. 1560–80) or someone in his circle (figure 8.5). The dwarf wears armor and an extravagant helmet with a *cimiero*, the ornamental

51 I discuss the topos of chivalric dwarfs in O’Byran, “Pisanello, Chivalric Dwarfs,” and in the Introduction to this volume.

52 Gold chains, some with medallions, accompany nobles and condottieri in contemporary portraiture such as seen in Anthonis Mor’s 1550 portrait of a condottiere wearing a chain with a medallion that denotes his membership in the Order of Santiago; the portrait is housed in the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid. Similar gold chains appear with the dwarfs in portraits produced for Archduke Ferdinand II in Innsbruck; see figs. 115 and 116 in Rabanser, “Largo, Largo,” and his figure 5.8 in chapter 5 of this volume.

53 See Lavin and Aronberg Lavin, “Duquesnoy’s ‘Nano di Créquì,’” 133.

54 The Louvre, which holds the portrait, identifies the dwarf as belonging to Cardinal Granvelle (Philip II’s chief minister in the Netherlands). Although some scholars have also postulated that the dwarf was Estanislao, the proportionate dwarf associated with Emperor Charles V, a mid-nineteenth-century engraving which shows the dwarf’s body and stocky legs more clearly, may cast doubt on this identification. The engraving is illustrated in Demmin et al., *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles*, 1:5, with a better reproduction viewable online by Alamy picture resources (*Le Nain, or the Dwarf of Cardinal de Granvelle, Antoine Perronet de Granvelle*). The manner of the dwarf’s presentation in the portrait bears a resemblance to Bertola’s dwarf in the Caprarola fresco, which may not be coincidental as Granvelle and Cardinal Alessandro were close friends.

Figure 8.5 Francesco Terzio (attributed), *Dwarf Thome[r]le in Armor*, after 1568. Oil on canvas. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, picture gallery, inv. no. 3839 © KHM-Museumsverband.



crest of feathered plumes that seems to match him in size, his chivalric bearing made clear by the hilt of his weapon just visible at his side and the weighty gold chain and medallion that hangs down below his waist.<sup>55</sup> In Thome[r]le's gloved hand he displays what appears to be a silver ceremonial mace or baton such as used by high-ranking military officers—another compositional prop that implicitly pokes fun at the diminutive subject.

In Habsburg Spain, Juan van der Hamen y León's portrait of 1626 presents a dwarf in similar parodic mode, the truncated figure also shown with a rapier and wielding a baton of command in his hand (figure 8.6). Dressed in fashionable breeches and a green waistcoat with gold buttons, his sartorial splendor has been enhanced with the gold chains draped across his front and the starched white collar popularly known as the *golilla*, the "uniform

55 I am grateful to Thomas Kuster, Curator of the Schloss Ambras collection, for first bringing this work to my attention. The towering headgear is reminiscent of that worn by the comical dwarf knight depicted by Pisanello in the fifteenth-century fresco in the Mantuan palace of the Gonzaga; see discussion by O'Bryan, "Pisanello, Chivalric Dwarfs," 15–16 and fig. 5.



Figure 8.6 Juan van der Hamen y León, *Portrait of a Dwarf*, ca. 1626. Oil on canvas, 122.5 × 87 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo: © Museo Nacional del Prado/Art Resource, NY.

of the Spanish court” that had recently replaced the elaborate ruff.<sup>56</sup> The dwarf was evidently in the service of Gaspar de Guzmán y Pimental, the count-duke of Olivares, the prime minister and *válido* (favorite) of Philip IV (r. 1621–40) (and the official responsible for instituting the dress reforms that led to the wearing of the *golilla*).<sup>57</sup> On the dwarf’s finger he wears a ring with

<sup>56</sup> Although *golilla* came to be used as a generic term, technically speaking it was the stiff (typically black) under-collar encircling the neck which supported the white *valona* (Walloon collar) allowing it to rise above the wearer’s neck; see discussion by Wunder in “Innovation and Tradition,” 111–23. The dwarf’s garment is made of a special type of cloth known as *stratagliato* (slashed fabric), which reflected the elite status of the wearer. I thank Isabella Campagnol for the information on *stratagliato*.

<sup>57</sup> Gaspar de Guzmán y Pimentel (1587–1645) had served as Philip’s tutor and was made his *válido* after Philip assumed the kingship. The dwarf was previously assumed to be Bartolillo (the suffix *-illo* indicating something small or dear), who was documented at Philip’s court from 1621 to 1626; Museo del Prado, “Portrait of a Dwarf.” However, the information included in the Prado’s Spanish description of the portrait posits the dwarf’s association with de Guzmán, noting that the painting was formerly in the collection of his cousin, together with other portraits of dwarfs and buffoons, including two by Velázquez; Museo del Prado,

a four-part cross motif, which seems to allude to the emblem of the chivalric order to which the count-duke belonged.<sup>58</sup> Notably, in a contemporaneous portrait painted by Diego Velázquez, the count-duke himself had been portrayed in like fashion wearing the *golilla*, a ring with what looks to be a similar design, and with the baton of command proudly displayed on the table next to him.<sup>59</sup> Unlike the Gersmueter portrait where the military references would have paid homage to the Farnese duke, in the dwarf's portrait van der Hamen has appropriated elements of the count-duke's dress and rank—and even the same style of mustache and a goatee—to show the dwarf lampooning his master. A time-honored tradition of court jesters (and buffoons and fools) for mocking the monarch, this manner of presentation would allude to the dwarf's putative function in de Guzmán's court.<sup>60</sup> Lending further support to this idea is his green costume, the color traditionally associated with the dress of fools which had been used for the attire of generic dwarfs in European imagery.<sup>61</sup> Van der Hamen's depiction of the dwarf in the guise of buffoon/fool is of particular interest for our discussion, since the museum inventory record for the Gersmueter portrait from 1865 referred to the sitter as a “dwarf buffoon of the court” (*nano buffone di Corte*). In composing this notation, it appears that the writer

“Retrato de enano.” On the dress reforms instituted under de Guzmán's directions, see Wunder, “Innovation and Tradition,” 117. Interestingly, the sumptuary laws that were part of these reforms forbade the wearing of gold embellishments (*ibid.*), a rule the dwarf is clearly flouting in the portrait.

58 The design on the dwarf's ring can be seen using the Zoom feature on the Prado website. The count-duke had been a member of the Order of Calatrava until 1624, at which point he joined the Order of Alcántara; see next.

59 For a discussion of the iconography and the illustration, see Hispanic Museum & Library, “Gaspar de Guzmán.” Unfortunately, it is difficult to see the exact design on the ring, but I would suggest it pertains to the chivalric order since the portrait depicts the count-duke wearing the green insignia of the Order of Alcántara under his cloak. An earlier portrait by Velázquez from 1624 shows the count-duke's previous association with the Order of Calatrava, indicated by the red insignia partially hidden under the black scarf draped across his chest. Now in the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand the latter work is viewable at: <https://masp.org.br/acervo/obra/retrato-do-conde-duque-de-olivares>.

60 On the related terminology, see Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, 1, and for examples of jesters mocking the king, 49–52. The Museo del Prado confirms the burlesque nature of the dwarf's presentation; “Retrato de enano.”

61 Moreau, *Fous et bouffons*, 60–62. Notably, Shakespeare referred to this practice in *Romeo and Juliet* writing that “none but fools do wear green” (act 2, scene 2). A number of works (especially Italian) painted in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries depict generic dwarfs wearing green costumes, which implicitly alluded to their role as court buffoons.

was resorting to age-old assumptions about court dwarfs, incorrectly using “dwarf” and “buffoon” as synonymous terms.<sup>62</sup>

The 1865 museum inventory record notwithstanding, in Gersmueter’s portrait he has given us no indication that his subject would have acted in the role of *nano buffone* at the Farnese court.<sup>63</sup> More importantly, there is one key element of his dress that allows us to firmly dispute the dwarf identification: the gorget. The armored collar undergirding the lace ruff, the gorget was a military accessory worn by courtiers, but was decidedly *not* part of the court dwarf’s apparel.<sup>64</sup> Gersmueter’s figure also has an aiguillette-like device affixed to his waistcoat, just below the gorget, which shows a cord tied into a triple (?) bow and terminating in a metal tip or aglet.<sup>65</sup> This insignia appears to be a configuration of the fasteners used to join metal armor plates together, similar to those appearing on the dress of military officials in contemporary portraits.<sup>66</sup> Of course it might be argued that the gorget and the aiguillette were meant to be read as parodic attributes like

62 A cogent example is the portrait of the buffoon “Knight Christoph” painted by Hans Wertinger in 1515, which in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was identified as a dwarf in the service of the prince-bishop of Freising, Philipp, count palatine of the Rhine and duke of Bavaria. Now reidentified as a *jester*, the portrait depicts the tall, full-length figure standing in front of a wall, with neither scale nor attributes to indicate that he is a dwarf. See discussion by Lübbecke and Martin, *Early German Painting*, 388–91, and the up-to-date corrected designation and description with the image by the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, “Hans Wertinger.” In a follow-up communication (June 2022) with Dr. Maria del Mar Borobia, Head Curator of Old Master Painting for the museum, she confirmed that the jester designation was assigned because the figure’s stature, and the size of his head, arms, and legs do not accord with the typology of a dwarf. Notably, the buffoon Perejón who appears in Anthonis Mor’s full-length portrait from ca. 1560 in the Museo del Prado was also previously referred to as a dwarf (Philippot, *Pittura fiamminga*, 220). Another more pertinent, contemporaneous example to the Gersmueter painting is the full-length portrait by an anonymous Netherlandish artist from 1608 that the Metropolitan Museum of Art earlier labeled *The Dwarf Hans Voorbruec*, but which has now also been correctly identified as a jester. See Allen and Gardner, *Concise Catalogue*, 36.

63 Despite accepting the dwarf designation, Marconi makes a similar point, allowing that not only is the figure not shown with servile connotations, but he is also being exalted for the rank he achieved in Alessandro’s court (presumably an implicit reference to the dwarf Giovanni Gioietta’s function as *aiutante di camera*); “Ritratto di Odoardo Farnese,” 84.

64 Although late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century portraits of court dwarfs, especially those affiliated with the Spanish courts, show the dwarf denizens wearing fancy ruffs and the *golilla*, I have not discovered any European portraits that portray dwarfs with gorgets.

65 On the “aiguillette,” see the definition and discussion in Planché, *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Costume*, 3–4 and plate II on succeeding page; and McCall, *Brilliant Bodies*, 161 (glossary) and *passim*.

66 For example, a portrait from 1562 now in the Ashmolean Museum depicts the earl of Lincoln, Lord High Admiral and a knight of the Garter, wearing a gorget and with aiguillettes down the front of his doublet.

the chivalric and military accouterments accompanying the dwarfs in the Terzio and van der Hamen portraits (see figures 8.5 and 8.6). However, once again, there is nothing remotely humorous or even whimsical about the manner in which Gersmueter's sitter has been represented. Instead, these sartorial references to battle strongly suggest that the artist has portrayed a favored official with a military background operating in Farnese employ.

### A New Identity for "Giangiovetta"

With this in mind, I might propose an alternative, if tentative, identification for Gersmueter's *gentiluomo*. A potential candidate may be Duke Alessandro's major-domo Paolo Rinaldi, whose pedigree was impressive enough for his portrait to have been a suitable addition to the Farnese collection.<sup>67</sup> From a Florentine family of noble standing, Rinaldi had fought in the Sienese wars of 1554–55 and was involved in the Habsburg invasion of the Papal States a year later. In the early 1570s, he had found a position in Alessandro's household, joining him in the naval expedition in the War of Lepanto in 1571 and subsequently accompanying the duke (in the capacity of captain or servant) on his campaign in the Low Countries.<sup>68</sup> Rinaldi's military valor was later acknowledged when his name appeared in a 1595 list of Florentines honored with the title of *Cavaliere di Santo Stefano* in the chivalric order established by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici in 1561 in recognition of service in the Sienese wars.<sup>69</sup> In addition to his military credentials, in Flanders during Alessandro's tenure as governor general in the Netherlands, Rinaldi had handled important administrative and financial dealings for the Habsburg government. Returning to Parma and Piacenza in 1592, he was appointed chamberlain of the ducal exchequer by Duke Alessandro, and put in charge of monitoring the affairs of Ranuccio's court. After Alessandro's death in December, Rinaldi remained in Ranuccio's service, and by 1599 was overseeing the beautification project at the Palazzo del Giardino, which involved interfacing with the sculptor Simone Moschino (who was also fabricating an over life-size statue of Duke Alessandro for the palace in Rome).<sup>70</sup> That same year Rinaldi composed his *Liber relationum* (Book of

67 Derks discusses Rinaldi's background, what little is known because of the loss of documents in the Farnese archives as referenced above, in "Fruits of War," especially 170–72.

68 Ibid., 170.

69 Rinaldi's name appears in the list compiled by Araldi, *L'Italia nobile nelle sue città*, 116.

70 Letters written by Rinaldo to Ranuccio give an idea of his active involvement in the artistic affairs of the court. In May 1599, Rinaldo reported on Moschino's plans for the palace project;

Reports), an “insider’s account” of the duke’s military campaigns for Philip II.<sup>71</sup> Ranuccio had commissioned the history in an attempt to revive his father’s reputation after the king had removed Alessandro from his post over disputes with his leadership style and his opposition to the war in France.<sup>72</sup> Dedicated to Ranuccio and (Cardinal) Odoardo, the *Liber* was thus meant to function as historical propaganda, immortalizing their father Alessandro as a valiant warrior, promoting the familial relationship with the Habsburg monarchy (Alessandro was the grandson of Charles V), and enhancing the Farnese dynastic reputation.<sup>73</sup>

Turning back to the portrait, the figure we may now identify as the putative Rinaldi has been dressed in a manner that acknowledges his military career and his high standing as an important member of the Farnese court.<sup>74</sup> As well as his fashionable “breeches of Walloon,” the aiguillette he proudly displays on his waistcoat would have functioned as a personalized emblem of his wartime activities. The commander’s red scarf, assigned such prominence in the composition, would have been appropriate recognition of Rinaldi’s service supporting Duke Alessandro in his military campaigns. These martial references would have been duly applicable to Duke Ranuccio, who modeled his image as ruler on the military exploits of his father.<sup>75</sup> The book (*libro*) on the table, a veritable symbol of the sitter’s erudition,

two years later he wrote the duke requesting guidance for the sculptor; see Ronchini, “Francesco e Simone Moschino,” 109, and Tietze, “Annibale Carraccis Galerie,” 130 respectively. Moschino’s statue of Duke Alessandro is discussed in n. 79 below; also see n. 83.

71 The full title was the “*Liber relationum eorum quae gesta fuere in Belgio et alibi per serenissimum D. Ducem Alexandrum Farnesium*,” which despite its Latin title, was written in the vernacular. According to Derks the text was “part of a wider culture of historical writing in the sixteenth century, particularly for military heroes”; “Fruits of War,” 154, 156, with synopsis at 172–77.

72 See Derks, *ibid.*, 158–66, who also discusses the dynastic politics involving Alessandro’s loss of favor with Philip II and Ranuccio’s attempts to stabilize the relationship; and the extended analysis by Bertini, “La nazione italiana nell’esercito di Alessandro Farnese.”

73 Glorifying Alessandro as an ancient-warrior hero, Rinaldi compared him to Alexander the Great, playing on their relationships to the two “Philips”: Alessandro to Philip II, and Alexander to his father Philip of Macedonia; Derks, “Fruits of War,” 173. Also see Leuschner, “Francesco Villamena’s ‘Apotheosis of Alessandro Farnese,’” 146 n. 7, 148, and 157. As Leuschner observes, “[a]s Charles V’s grandson, Alessandro had been made the subject of imperial Habsburg allegory from an early age,” which included paintings, prints, and coins that were influenced by Habsburg iconography (157).

74 Although accepting the dwarf designation, Le Breton himself paid particular attention to this manner of dress, referring to Gersmueter having portrayed the figure “with refined attire and attitudes worthy of a person of considerable social standing”; *I dipinti fiamminghi*, 68. Marconi made a similar observation, as referenced in n. 63 above.

75 On Ranuccio, see Derks, “Fruits of War,” 166.



might more specifically allude to Rinaldi's literary endeavor, a *libro* invoking the *Liber*.<sup>76</sup> The gratuitous addition of the flowers in the vase on the shelf in the background may have been a special nod to Ranuccio's brother Cardinal Odoardo.<sup>77</sup> A noted collector of rare varieties who had lavish flower gardens at his property in Rome, Odoardo had a long-established epistolary relationship with Rinaldi who had consulted with him during his writing of the *Liber*.<sup>78</sup>

It is not known when the Gersmueter portrait was initially transferred from Parma to Rome, but if the relocation took place sometime after 1612 when Cardinal Odoardo began bringing Parmese works to the Palazzo Farnese, he may have planned for this portrayal of "military prowess" to complement his earlier projects honoring the heroism of his father.<sup>79</sup> In whatever location the work was initially displayed, some thirty years later the unframed portrait was recorded hanging on a wall in the palace library.<sup>80</sup> One of the 100 or so paintings of various subjects housed in the same room that were listed in the ducal inventories, the portrait may have received only scant attention from the palace officials composing the entry. Perhaps remembering the name of the dwarf possibly uttered by Duke Odoardo or his entourage during his visit to Rome in 1639, they assigned "Giovangiovetta" to the inventory record, an inaccurate transcription of "Giovanni Goietta"—or the name of another dwarf altogether.<sup>81</sup>

76 Although it is not readily apparent, Lavagetto indicates that the cover of the book contains a lily (which was a symbol of the Farnese, as noted above n. 2); "Johann Gersmueter," 282.

77 Some of these flowers seem to be hyacinths and narcissus, with the red flower on the mantle perhaps meant to evoke a "blood red" anemone. All three of these flowers were referenced in the mythological fresco decorations painted by Annibale Carracci for Cardinal Odoardo in 1603 in the Palazzetto Farnese; Witte, *Artful Hermitage*, 31. I thank Barbara Price for her help in identifying these flowers.

78 On his flower gardens, *ibid.*, 38–41. In addition to other communications, Rinaldi had corresponded with Odoardo in letters sent to him in 1599 regarding the *Liber* project; Derks, "Fruits of War," 172 n. 52. And see next.

79 After Duke Alessandro's death in 1592 Cardinal Odoardo commissioned artworks for the Palazzo Farnese that were intended to celebrate his father's military career and keep alive his memory. Among these works was Moschino's sculpture of the Farnese duke (mentioned above), created the same year the *Liber* was composed, and which occupied a place of honor in the Salone Grande; see especially Leuschner, "Francesco Villamena's 'Apotheosis of Alessandro Farnese,'" and Robertson, "Artistic Patronage of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese," 360 ff. Cardinal Odoardo had begun adding the paintings of Correggio and Parmigianino, both Parmese artists, to his collection after 1612, and may have continued bringing works to Rome until 1622 the year he moved to Parma to assume the regency for his ten-year-old nephew Odoardo (as noted above, n. 39).

80 Bertini "Johann Gersmueter's Portrait of a Dwarf," and *La Galleria del Duca*, 217.

81 The seeming facility with which the Roman officials inventorying the portrait ascribed a name to the alleged dwarf suggests they may well have recalled a conversation during Duke

## Conclusion

Since no documents have surfaced to confirm that this portrait was a ducal commission, tantalizing questions remain. Given that Gersmueter was a rather obscure Flemish artist, is it possible that Duke Ranuccio and/or Paolo Rinaldi made his acquaintance during their time in Flanders for military campaigns and lured him to Parma? Could Gersmueter have painted the portrait as an exhibition piece hoping to get further commissions such as for the portraits that followed?<sup>82</sup> Or might Rinaldi have commissioned the portrait himself, commemorating his personal military achievements and his standing as a noble courtier, and presented the painting as a gift to his Farnese patron?<sup>83</sup> Such scenarios could be the reason no financial records for the portrait have been found, despite those for payment to Gersmueter for the two other portraits (including the one of Cardinal Odoardo) executed for Ranuccio around the same time. Alternatively, if the work was ordered by Ranuccio and the record of payment lost, he may have viewed the portrait as a fitting tribute to the author of the *Liber*, a visual complement to Rinaldi's literary efforts honoring the Farnese legacy. In this respect, the portrait would have been commensurate with the duke's projects commissioning representative works of visual art, poetry, and histories to commemorate his late father's campaign, such as Cardinal Odoardo had done previously at the Palazzo Farnese.<sup>84</sup>

Of course, the hypothesis surrounding Rinaldi's presumed identity can only remain speculative, but at the very least the issues raised in this

Odoardo's visit. Contrast that with the hesitancy of the officials in Parma to confirm the identity some forty years later, despite the fact that institutional memory would have been more at play in the Palazzo del Giardino where a dwarf of that (or a similar) name had actually been in residence—and who may have been depicted in the palace frescoes.

82 I proposed a somewhat similar patronage scenario for Agnolo Bronzino's double-sided portrait of the Medici court dwarf Morgante, arguing that it was not commissioned by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici as is commonly alleged, but rather was an independent initiative on Bronzino's part; see O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," especially 94.

83 Given Rinaldi's involvement with the artistic projects for the Palazzo del Giardino, he would have been well-placed to engage with Gersmueter if the artist had come to the court in Parma. A potential problem with reading the portrait as Rinaldi is that based upon his biography, he would have been in his late sixties or early seventies. Although it is difficult to discern the sitter's age in the full-length portrait (Bertini does refer to him as "above middle age"), two other bust-sized portraits that were made a few years later presumably based on the original may offer better visual confirmation. Both show the same individual with the fancy ruffle but without the gorget and wearing black: <https://www.dorotheum.com/en/1/6416802/#> and <https://rkd.nl/en/explore/images/293782> (which displays a more aged visage). Le Breton, *I dipinti fiamminghi*, 69, refers to the latter figure as a portrait of the dwarf Gioietta, and indicates that he was Ranuccio's court dwarf.

84 For Ranuccio's projects, see Derks, "Fruits of War," 166–67.

discussion provide ample justification for reassessing the designation of Gersmueter's sitter as the "dwarf Giangiovetta" (perhaps more so if said "Giangiovetta" (Giovanni Gioietta) was actually the dwarf represented in figure 8.3). If, as Rinaldi had put forth in the *Liber*, Duke Alessandro had an aversion to such *prodigi* (prodigies/wonders), that would further put in doubt the notion that Giangiovetta (or even Johannem) was ever in his service.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, for the Farnese court officials in Rome tasked with inventorying the work in 1641—almost fifty years after the duke's death—drawing on current events and dynastic precedent, if not also responding to verbal input, they evidently imagined the portrait to be that of Alessandro's dwarf, committing their impressions to paper and setting into play a tradition that has persisted for close to four centuries.<sup>86</sup> Although the painting is exactly contemporaneous with European portraits of court dwarfs shown with gold necklaces and with swords and armor—the latter accessories that suggest military prowess but that might also be used in parodic fashion—the gorget and aiguillette worn by Gersmueter's figure and the nobility with which he has been represented would rule out a similar farcical reading. In the final analysis, therefore, I would argue that the portrait does not represent a "real"—proportionate—dwarf at all, but rather a *gentilhuomo* of some importance who was once affiliated with the Farnese ducal court.

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85 As van der Essen notes, Alessandro "despised the importance attributed to omens, to dreams, to 'prodigi', and paid no attention to them" (disprezzava l'importanza attribuita ai presagi, ai sogni, ai 'prodigi', e non vi prestava alcuna attenzione); "Alessandro Farnese." Dwarfs were considered to be human prodigies; see n. 44 above.

86 This assumes, of course, that the compilers were actually looking at the portrait when they entered the record, and that the wax seal with the corresponding inventory number (mentioned in n. 2 above) was affixed at the same time.

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**Robin O'Bryan** (PhD) is an art historian whose research focuses on issues related to popular culture in Italian Renaissance art, especially dwarfs. Her published articles have appeared in journals and anthologies, including *Games and Game Playing in European Art and Literature* which she also edited for Amsterdam University Press.

## 9. *Per mano della Maria Nana: A Female Dwarf in the Retinue of Eleonora di Toledo\**

*Sarah McBryde*

### Abstract

This chapter considers the role of female dwarfs in noblewomen's entourages by focusing on Maria, a dwarf attendant in the retinue of Eleonora di Toledo (1522–1562) at the Medici court in Florence. The discussion explores both the potential symbolic functions of female dwarf figures in artworks and the archival evidence regarding female dwarfs' individual activities within the court. Contrary to the conventional perception of court dwarfs as comic entertainers, archival sources indicate that Maria acted as a trusted go-between for the duchess. The essay also proposes a tentative identification of Maria as the model for the female dwarf in Giorgio Vasari's depiction of *The Marriage of Catherine de' Medici*, commissioned by Eleonora's husband, Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–1574).

**Keywords:** Eleonora di Toledo, Catherine de' Medici, Giorgio Vasari, Michelangelo, marriage, Palazzo Vecchio

Scholarship regarding court dwarfs during the Renaissance and early modern periods has traditionally focused on male dwarfs, who feature prominently in contemporary written sources, such as secretaries' letters and ambassadors' reports. Male dwarfs also appear frequently in the visual record, as seen, for example, in Agnolo Bronzino's double-sided portrait (pre-1553)

\* This essay is derived from a case study in my PhD dissertation, "Making a Visible Difference: Symbolism and Individuality in Representations of the Medici Court Dwarfs in Early Modern Florence" (Birkbeck College, University of London, 2022).



of Braccio di Bartolo, nicknamed Morgante, who served as an attendant to Cosimo I de' Medici (r. 1537–74).<sup>1</sup> Although female dwarfs are recorded within aristocratic women's entourages across Europe, from Isabella d'Este in Mantua to Elizabeth I in England, extant documents provide far less information about their lives, and as part of the "domestic" female sphere they have, until recently, been largely ignored.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in comparison to their male dwarf counterparts, very few images of them survive, a notable exception being Andrea Mantegna's portrait of Barbara of Brandenburg's unidentified female dwarf, who appears in the Gonzaga group portrait in the Camera Picta frescoes (1465–74) at the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua (see figure I.10 in the Introduction).<sup>3</sup>

This chapter examines evidence regarding female dwarfs in the sixteenth-century Medici court in Florence and takes a dual approach. Firstly, it considers the role of these attendants within noblewomen's households by assessing archival material regarding Maria, a female dwarf in the retinue of Cosimo I's consort Eleonora di Toledo (1522–1562).<sup>4</sup> Secondly, it proposes a tentative identification of Maria as the model for the female dwarf in Giorgio Vasari's portrayal of *The Marriage of Catherine de' Medici to Henri, Duke of Orléans* (ca. 1556–62), commissioned by Cosimo I for the Sala di Clemente VII in the Palazzo Vecchio. Rather than commemorating an individual present at Catherine's marriage, which had taken place in Marseille in 1533, I propose that Vasari's inclusion of a female dwarf from the contemporary Florentine court allowed him to incorporate references to artistic conventions regarding the portrayal of ideal femininity, and also draw on the symbolic resonances of dwarfs and dwarf imagery in his depiction of the bride.

## Female Dwarfs in the Medici Court

Archival sources suggest that, certainly in Florence, there were fewer female dwarfs than there were male dwarfs at court, which may have contributed to their lack of representation in either the visual or written records. Although

1 Cosimo was the second duke of Florence, who was invested as grand duke of Tuscany in 1569.

2 Regarding Isabella d'Este's retinue, see Luzio and Renier, "Buffoni, nani e schiavi dei Gonzaga." Ravenscroft has written extensively about female dwarfs in the sixteenth-century Spanish Habsburg court; see "Dwarfs as Ladies' Maids," and chapter 7 of this volume.

3 Barbara of Brandenburg, the marchesa of Mantua, is known to have had two female dwarfs, Antonia and Lucia, in her personal retinue during the 1470s, one of whom may be the dwarf depicted; see Signorini, *Opus hoc tenue*, 286, n. 123.

4 Cosimo and Eleonora married in 1539. She was the daughter of the viceroy of Naples.

over forty dwarfs are mentioned in documents in the Florentine state archives from the first hundred years of the Medici duchy, only eleven were women, and of those, only five are referred to by name.<sup>5</sup> Of the two female dwarfs noted in the ducal household during Eleonora's lifetime, it is Maria who features most prominently in records from 1550 until around 1588–89. Maria's name first appears in a clothing order for the duchess's suite, which was comprised of twelve female attendants and eleven servants.<sup>6</sup> Listed in two separate columns, Maria is included under *dame et cameriere* (ladies and chambermaids), giving her rather higher status than the other servants described as *stiave* (slaves). Although this document specifies fabrics in *tané* (brown) for the entire retinue—velvet and other quality fabrics for the ladies and chambermaids, including Maria, and plainer cloths for the “slaves”—subsequent orders indicate that Maria was generally dressed in fashionable and expensively dyed black garments, either of velvet, wool or cotton twill, but *senza fornimenti* (without decoration).<sup>7</sup> Maria's elegant and sober apparel is therefore in line with other ladies in Eleonora's retinue, rather than her serving women, and does not correspond with the more colorful attire appropriate to a court entertainer. The fabrics used also highlight her favored status as exempt from the sumptuary laws introduced

5 The following female dwarfs are named in sixteenth-century court documents (with active dates): Piera (1544), Maria (1550–89), Francesca (1574–89), Domenica “La Trottola” (1574–89), and Soffia, a Polish dwarf who entered the retinue of Grand Duchess Bianca Cappello as a child (ca. 1581–82); another unnamed female dwarf was sent to Bianca from Poland in 1586. Margaret of Austria, the wife of Duke Alessandro de' Medici (r. 1532–37), appears to have employed an unnamed female dwarf (ca. 1536). Four further unidentified female dwarfs are recorded in the household of Grand Duchess Christine of Lorraine (1588–89). Two of these women could have been Soffia and the other Polish dwarf, who possibly remained at court after Bianca's death in 1587; however, the same 1588–89 payroll document separately records that Maria, Francesca, and Domenica were receiving “pension” payments as retired court staff by this time, as is discussed below.

6 Archivio di Stato di Firenze (henceforth ASF), Mediceo del Principato (henceforth MdP) Carteggio Universale 616, Ins. 19, fols 434r–35r: clothing order for the duchess's female household, dated December 27, 1550.

7 ASF, MdP, Carteggio Universale 616, Ins. 19, fol. 434v, lists various fabrics in *tané*, including *panno di lana di garbo* (quality woolen cloth), *velluto* (velvet), *tela di venetia* (Venetian cotton), *feltro* (felted wool used to stiffen bodices) and *nastro di seta et aghetti* (silk ribbon and aglets), to dress the twelve ladies, chambermaids and the female dwarf. Fol. 435r lists plainer fabrics in the same color: *panno* (plain wool), *feltro* and *tela botana* (cotton), to dress the eleven *stiave* (slaves). A separate order (fol. 436r) specifies “black gowns without decoration” (*gamurre nere senza fornimenti*) for “Anna, Dianora, and Maria the dwarf,” reflecting other clothing orders for Maria, generally made from quality black fabrics.

by Cosimo in 1546, which prohibited non-elites from wearing luxury cloths, such as velvet.<sup>8</sup>

Eleonora's personal papers reveal Maria's close relationship with her patroness as a trusted go-between handling sums of money while conducting the duchess's private business. The *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni* (Bureau of Royal Possessions) account books from 1551–58 list payments into and out of Eleonora's personal coffers, meticulously recorded by her treasurer and steward, Tommaso di Iacopo de' Medici.<sup>9</sup> Maria's name appears numerous times in these ledgers delivering or receiving cash amounts on the duchess's behalf, with entries described as *dalla Maria nana* or *per mano della Maria nana* (from or by the hand of Maria the dwarf).<sup>10</sup> She is unusual as one of the few women tasked with such activities and is the only dwarf regularly mentioned in this context.<sup>11</sup> Along with presenting several payments of 200 *scudi*, which Tommaso registered to Eleonora's "cash in hand" account, some of the entries appear to be monies used for Eleonora's personal purchases, as might be expected of an attendant in a noblewoman's household.<sup>12</sup> For instance, on September 18, 1556, Maria delivered three gold coins to Tommaso "to give to the German goldsmith," presumably for some kind of jewelry item.<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere Maria handles larger sums relating to Eleonora's financial and charitable activities. On June 17, 1553, she delivered a *sacchetto* (little bag) containing 989 gold coins. Perhaps due to the size of this payment,

8 On Cosimo's sumptuary laws, see Niccoli, "Costume and the Court of Cosimo and Eleonora de Medici," 106–8.

9 Tommaso de' Medici acted as Eleonora's *sottomaggiordomo* (under steward) from 1549, as well as her treasurer, and was promoted to *maggiordomo* (chief steward) in 1556.

10 See ASF, Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni, Libro di Debitori e Creditori (henceforth Scrittoio) 4136 (1551–54) and 4137 (1554–58). With gratitude to Laura Overpelt for her advice on these ledgers.

11 Other women mentioned in these ledgers are generally recipients of payments from the duchess, rather than organizing the transactions.

12 See examples in ASF, Scrittoio 4136, fol. 21r (and fol. 22r), dated June 20, 1552; fol. 147r (and fol. 146r), dated April 28, 1554; and ASF, Scrittoio 4137, fol. 32v (and fol. 2r), dated January 1, 1554 (fl. d.) (in Florentine dating the year beginning on March 25), which record various payments of 200 *scudi*/gold *scudi* ("scudi duecento/due cento d'oro in oro") received by Tommaso from Maria and cross-referenced to Eleonora's cash in hand account ("Cassa di danari contanti ... alla Signora Duchessa per corrente"). One (1) Florentine *scudo* was worth approximately 7 *lire* (or 140 *soldi*) in contemporary money, with gold coins (*scudi d'oro in oro*) having a slightly higher value; see Cipolla, *Money in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, 28, 30. To put these sums in context, the average daily wage of a skilled laborer in 1551–58 was around 23 *soldi*; see Goldthwaite, *Building of Renaissance Florence*, 438.

13 ASF, Scrittoio 4137, fol. 136r "Addi 18 (September 1556) scudi tre d'oro in oro reco Thomaso de Medici contanti dalla Maria nana per dare alla tedesca orrefice" (cross-referenced to fol. 181v, which records the payment out).

Tommaso carefully recorded details of the transaction, noting that Maria had received the money from the duchess's secretary, Cristoforo Herrera, who in turn had been given the funds by a servant of Cardinal di Burgos as a repayment towards the sum of 1780 *scudi* that he owed to Eleonora.<sup>14</sup> Another transaction conducted by Maria related to the Jesuits, for whom Eleonora was an advocate and patron; on May 10, 1556, she conveyed the sum of 25 gold *scudi* "to be given to the reformed priests," recorded by Tommaso later in the ledger as an outgoing "alms donation" by the duchess.<sup>15</sup>

The size and potentially confidential nature of these payments suggest that Maria held a position of considerable trust within Eleonora's inner circle. By contrast, the occasional transactions relating to the dwarf Morgante are for small payments of one or two *scudi*, noted as *donatini* (little gifts) from the duchess.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, Maria appears to have been poorly paid. In the ducal payroll of 1558–59 she received a tiny allowance of 3 *soldi*, 10 *denari* per month, substantially less than Eleonora's other female servants who were largely paid around 2 *scudi* each.<sup>17</sup> Maria was allocated the same paltry stipend in a payroll for women of the household in 1563–64, after Eleonora's death. This figure is less than Beatrice "the Moor" who served at table, and Caterina the laundress, who were paid 1 and 5 *scudi* respectively.<sup>18</sup> However, unlike these two servants, Maria is registered under *bocche* (mouths to feed), indicating that she was resident at court, which may explain her lower salary as she would have benefited from "payment in kind" via bed and board in the duchess's staff quarters.

14 ASF, Scrittoio 4136, fol. 97r: "Adi detto (*scudi*) novecentootantanove d'oro in oro di italia havuti per uno sachetto dalla Maria nana disse haverli havuti dal secretario Herera pertanti che detto disse haverne havuti dal Cardinale di Burgos per mano d'un creato di SS R'ma p'pre di (*scudi*) 1780 che S R'ma debbe à S E Ill'ma."

15 ASF, Scrittoio 4137, fol. 136r: "Addi 10 maggio (*scudi*) venticinque d'oro in oro reco' Thomaso de Medici contanti dalla Maria nana per dare ai preti riformati" (cross-referenced to fol. 188r, where the payment is referred to as *elemosina* (alms)). Eleonora was instrumental in the foundation of Jesuit missions in Florence and Siena during the 1550s, despite Cosimo's initial reluctance. The Jesuit mission in Siena was founded in 1556–57, following the establishment of their Florentine mission in 1550–54. Eleonora made regular donations of money and food to both; see Comerford, *Jesuit Foundations*, chapters 4 and 5, 107–65.

16 ASF, Scrittoio, Giornale (1552–54) 4140, fol. 3v, dated August 12, 1552: "(*scudi*) 2 a Morgante nano"; ASF, Scrittoio 4137, fol. 18r, dated February 13, 1554 (fl. d.): "Uno d'oro in oro pagato a Morgante nano ... per donatino." These gifts from Eleonora are separate from payments Morgante received as a salaried member of the duke's household staff, as recorded in the ducal payrolls.

17 ASF, MdP, Carteggio Universale 631, fol. 6v, ducal payroll, 1558–59.

18 ASF, MdP, Carteggio Universale 616, fol. 262r, ducal payroll, February 1563 (fl. d.); and fol. 266v, ducal payroll, June 1564.



Figure 9.1 Giorgio Vasari, *The Marriage of Catherine de' Medici to Henri, Duke of Orléans*, ca. 1556–62. Fresco, Sala di Clemente VII, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Photo: Raffaello Bencini/Bridgeman Images.

Maria is not mentioned in Eleonora's last will and testament, hastily drawn up on December 16, 1562, a day before the duchess's death, although she may possibly have been a recipient of the 300 *scudi* payment that Eleonora left to each of her staff.<sup>19</sup>

From 1574, Maria appears with another female dwarf, Francesca, in the household rolls prepared for Cosimo's successor, Francesco I (r. 1574–87). The two dwarfs received 6 *scudi* per month for their upkeep at the Florentine convent of Sant'Onofrio ("il Fuligno").<sup>20</sup> These maintenance payments continued throughout Francesco's rule when they are recorded as *due nane monache* (two dwarf nuns) in 1586. During the reign of his brother and successor, Ferdinando I (r. 1587–1609), they are listed under "pensioned women"

19 ASF, Miscellanea Medicea 5922A, fols 128r–31r, Eleonora's will: fols 128v–29r include the duchess's bequests of 2000 *scudi* for her unmarried ladies-in-waiting and 300 *scudi* for her other staff.

20 ASF, MdP, Carteggio Universale 616, fol. 307r, ducal payroll, ca. 1574; fol. 357v, ducal payroll, dated April 20, 1574; and fol. 372r, ducal payroll of 1579, all include payments of 6 *scudi* to Maria and Francesca at the convent.

in the payroll of 1588–89.<sup>21</sup> In the absence of other documentary evidence, it is only possible to speculate about Maria's fate. Notwithstanding the continuing payments she received from the ducal coffers, presumably until her death, Maria's usefulness at court may have diminished after Eleonora's demise, or she may simply have chosen to retreat into the secure confines of a religious institution in her old age. That said, her former presence at court may be commemorated in the visual record, as is considered in the following discussion.

### A Portrait of Maria?

The most prominent depiction of a female dwarf among the artistic commissions from Cosimo and Eleonora's era is in Vasari's portrayal of *The Marriage of Catherine de' Medici* for the Sala dedicated to Pope Clement VII (Giulio de' Medici, r. 1523–34) (figure 9.1).<sup>22</sup> The work was commissioned by Cosimo as part of his refurbishments to the Quartiere di Leone X in the Palazzo Vecchio, which served as the ducal residence. The oval cornice piece occupies a conspicuous position opposite the main entrance to the room and shows Clement presiding over the wedding, as Henri, duke of Orléans (the future King Henri II of France, r. 1547–59), offers a ring to place on Catherine's outstretched hand, surrounded by guests crowded onto a stepped platform. On the left, King François I stands behind his son with other male courtiers and prelates, while on the right, Catherine is accompanied by various elegantly dressed ladies and matrons. However, this seemingly conventional wedding scene includes several unusual elements: a lion prowls around Henri's feet, two allegorical figures observe the proceedings from a separate stone plinth to the right, and the bride and groom are attended respectively by a female and male dwarf positioned in the foreground.

21 ASF, Miscellanea Medicea 264, fols 27v–28r, ducal payroll of 1586 under *lemosina* (alms): "Due nane monache in Fuligno (*scudi*) 6." This entry may be slightly misleading, as there is no other indication that Maria or Francesca took religious vows and may simply refer to their residence in the convent. ASF, Depositeria Generale, Parte Antica 389, ducal payroll of 1588–89, fol. 25r, records a payment of 6 *ducati* to Maria and Francesca in *Fuligno* under *donne provisionate che non servono* (pensioned women who no longer serve). Domenica ("Trottola Nana") also appears in the same list, receiving 3 *ducati*, but is not noted as resident in Sant'Onofrio or any other monastic institution.

22 O'Bryan proposes that a female dwarf also features in the grisaille wainscoting decorations by Stradanus (Jan Van der Straet) depicting *The Donation of the Beret and Sword to Florence* (1560–61), for the Sala di Leone X (private communication).

As the orphaned daughter of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici and the Bourbon princess Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne, Catherine (1519–1589) was the last direct and, importantly, the last legitimate descendent of the main branch of the Medici family, and therefore a valuable pawn in the political and dynastic ambitions of her “uncle” Clement VII.<sup>23</sup> Catherine's marriage to Henri in 1533 represented a major political coup for Clement by allying the Medici dynasty with the French royal house of Valois. The marriage had taken place only a year after the Medici had been restored to power in Florence under the auspices of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, with the investiture of Alessandro de' Medici (probably Clement's illegitimate son), as the first hereditary duke of Florence in 1532.<sup>24</sup>

Vasari was apparently anxious to establish accurate details of this important event. This is evident from his correspondence in 1556–57 with both Cosimo and the humanist scholar Cosimo Bartoli, who devised the room's decorative scheme, in which Vasari requested additional eyewitness information and noted likenesses he had obtained (or required) for those who had been present.<sup>25</sup> His use of existing templates is visible in the completed artwork, which incorporates recognizable references to paintings by other artists, including Jean Clouet's portrait of François I (ca. 1525–30) and Jacopo Pontormo's various representations of Cosimo's mother, Maria Salviati (1530s–40s).<sup>26</sup> Among the group of prelates, the depiction of Catherine's second cousin, Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici, follows the facial type established by Titian in his portrait of *Ippolito de' Medici in Hungarian Costume* (ca. 1532–33), which other artists also copied in their images of the young noble.<sup>27</sup> Vasari details these and other individuals

23 As the nephew of Cathine's great-grandfather, Lorenzo de' Medici, “Il Magnifico,” Clement was actually her first cousin twice removed.

24 Alessandro was recognized as the son of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, making him Catherine's half-brother; however, many scholars suggest that he was the son of Clement, while still a cardinal, and a servant girl; see Simonetta, *Caterina*, 66.

25 Vasari's letter to Cosimo I at Poggio a Caiano, dated December 26, 1556, informs the duke that he can find no one who remembers exact details of the ring-giving ceremony itself but recalls that Cosimo's mother, Maria Salviati, was present. He notes that various members of the French royal family also attended, for whom he has “neither portrait medals nor likenesses”; see full Italian transcript in Frey, *Der Literarische Nachlass*, 1:462–65. See also a letter from Cosimo Bartoli to Vasari, dated (April?) 1556, *ibid.*, 1:447–51; and a letter from Vasari to Cosimo I at Poggio a Caiano, dated January 4, 1556 (fl. d.), *ibid.*, 1:470–71.

26 Clouet, *Portrait of François I*, Louvre, Paris. See, for example, Pontormo's *Maria Salviati with Giulia de' Medici*, ca. 1539, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

27 Titian, *Ippolito de' Medici in Hungarian Costume*, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. See also Girolamo da Carpi (?), *Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici with Marco Bracci*, ca. 1533, National Gallery, London,

in the scene in his *Ragionamenti sopra le invenzioni* (Reasonings on the Inventions).<sup>28</sup> Drafted 1558–68, around the time that the refurbishments were conducted, but not published until 1588 (fourteen years after his death), the work was written as a fictional dialogue between the artist and Cosimo's son Francesco, explaining the iconographic program of the decorations at the Palazzo Vecchio commissioned by his father.

The two dwarf figures appear to be anomalies in Vasari's drive for historical accuracy.<sup>29</sup> The *Ragionamenti* names Henri's dwarf attendant as "Gradasso," but although Ippolito de' Medici did have a male dwarf named Gradasso Berrettai da Norcia in his Roman retinue during the 1530s, various details about Vasari's figure indicate that he is not intended to represent the dwarf from the cardinal's household.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Vasari's dwarf appears to be based on a visual source directly available to the artist. In his dialogue, it is the young "Prince" who identifies the "most lifelike" portrayal of "Gradasso nano."<sup>31</sup> That the dwarf is recognizable to the fictive Francesco (and by extension to other contemporary viewers of the image or to subsequent readers of the *Ragionamenti*) suggests the figure was modeled on Cosimo's dwarf, Gradasso d'Arcangiolo Cappelli dall'Amatrice (or "dalla Matrice"), who was present in the ducal entourage between 1546 and 1572, rather than the earlier dwarf Gradasso in Ippolito's Roman household.<sup>32</sup> Another unusual element gives the male dwarf a particular connection to the individual in the Florentine court: he is proportionate.<sup>33</sup> In his 1548 discourse "On the

which repeats Titian's prototype.

28 Vasari, *Ragionamenti*, 208–9.

29 Of the other "unusual" elements in the wedding party, Vasari refers to the lion as belonging to the French king. It may represent the gift François had made to Ippolito of a tame lion previously presented to him by the Ottoman corsair Barbarossa; see Simonetta, *Caterina*, 88. The lion's gesture of extending its right paw may also reference the pose of the *Marzocco* lion, a traditional Florentine emblem. The separate allegorical figures are discussed below.

30 Gradasso Berrettai (or Berretini) da Norcia is the subject of a satirical poem (1532) by Francesco Berni and is often assumed to be the dwarf represented in Giulio Romano's *Vision of the Cross* fresco in the Vatican's Sala di Costantino, commissioned in 1519–21 by Pope Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici, r. 1513–21); see figure 1.3 in the Introduction to this volume. This misidentification is discussed in O'Bryan, "Medici Pope," 600, n. 9.

31 Vasari, *Ragionamenti*, 209: "PRINCIPE: 'Voi ci avete anco fatto Gradasso nano, che è naturalissimo'" (PRINCE/FRANCESCO: You have also portrayed Gradasso the dwarf, who is most lifelike).

32 In 1535 Ippolito had given Gradasso Berrettai da Norcia to the *condottiere* Alfonso d'Avalos d'Aquino, marchese del Vasto (Guasto), who was shortly after appointed governor of Milan; see Crimi and Spila, *Nanerie*, 56, n. 24, citing a letter by Paolo Giovio describing the gift.

33 Proportionate dwarfism (commonly resulting from hypopituitarism) causes restricted growth but with average physical proportions between the head, torso, and limbs.



generation of monsters and whether they are intended by Nature or not," the Florentine humanist Benedetto Varchi mentions Cosimo's attendant in his discussion on the different causes and types of dwarfism, noting that: "When it is caused by too little food, then they are really small but have proportionate limbs and seem like young children, as we see every day in Gradasso."<sup>34</sup>

Although Catherine is known to have retained several male and female dwarfs at the French court after she became queen in 1547, there is scant evidence of her having dwarf attendants at the marriage in 1533, and Vasari's use of a contemporary model for the male dwarf suggests these figures could have been embellishments to reports of the wedding he had obtained.<sup>35</sup> Rather than commemorating individuals actually present, the two dwarf figures may instead have important symbolic functions pertinent to the scene. By adding these figures, Vasari was able to draw visual attention to the virtues of two of the main protagonists: the bride and groom. If, as with Gradasso, Vasari had sought a model for Catherine's attendant within Cosimo's court, then Maria is the most obvious candidate as the only female dwarf who can be securely identified in Eleonora's entourage when the fresco was executed. Of the female dwarfs mentioned in archival sources during this period, Piera disappears from the records by 1544, and the others are not mentioned until later salary rolls for Cosimo's household after Eleonora's death.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Vasari does not mention Maria in the *Ragionamenti* may simply be due to his overlooking an "unimportant" female character, who had largely retired from the court after her patroness's demise, when he was drafting his recollections. Furthermore, as scholars

34 Varchi, "Lezione," 104: "Ma quando viene dal poco cibo, allora sono ben piccoli, ma hanno le membra proporzionate, & piono fanciulli di poca età, come vedemo tutto'l dì in Gradasso." See also O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 86. With gratitude to Maurizio Arfaioi for his advice regarding these connections between Gradasso dall'Amatrice and the male dwarf in Vasari's panel; and see O'Bryan, *ibid.*, 99, n. 19. The Medici Archive Project Bia database also uses this image of Henri's dwarf attendant in its entries for Gradasso (<http://bia.medici.org>).

35 Frieda, *Catherine*, 51, notes that Catherine's entourage in Marseille included Maria the "Moor," and two Turkish servants, Agnes and Margaret. Two female dwarfs were present at the French court in the 1530s, although Catherine's own dwarf attendants largely appear after 1547; by 1579, Catherine had three female dwarfs and five male dwarfs in her retinue. Ghadessi, "Inventoried Monsters," 272, also notes a female dwarf, Demoiselle Jeanne Petit, and Rene Rondeau, *tailleur des nains* (the dwarfs' tailor), as beneficiaries in Catherine's will.

36 As noted previously, Maria appears in numerous documents from 1550 to 1588–89. Piera appears only in *Guardaroba* (ducal wardrobe) ledgers from April to June 1544. Francesca and Domenica "La Trottola" do not appear until the retrospective salary rolls detailing Cosimo's household in 1574, through to Ferdinando's payroll of 1588–89, and therefore may have entered the court after Eleonora's death.

have noted, there is almost no mention of Eleonora or the decorations for her apartments in the *Ragionamenti*, and this omission may reflect an intentional decision to avoid references to the duchess after her death.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, Vasari would have been unlikely to recount details of Eleonora's dwarf attendant.

The tradition of maintaining court dwarfs as conspicuous symbols of nobility was an established practice for ruling families across Italy (and elsewhere) and one which the Medici quickly embraced after their elevation to hereditary dukes in 1532. As Robin O'Bryan has observed, of all the varied accoutrements of elite status "perhaps none had as much cachet as the court dwarf."<sup>38</sup> Vasari's decision to add dwarf attendants to his portrayal of Catherine's marriage into the French royal house may therefore reflect this traditional function of dwarfs as markers of rank, to underscore the significance of this important dynastic alliance, which had served to further embed the Medici family's position within European aristocracy. However, there is a striking contrast in the way the two dwarfs are represented. Gradasso, whose contemporary costume mirrors that of Henri, particularly his elegant cape with its fur collar, appears to be an attribute of the groom's noble status. Meanwhile, Maria, if we may suppose it is her, is dressed completely differently from the bride and the other women in the image, suggesting that she has been assigned another iconographical function (see figure 9.2). Her conspicuously large drop earring(s) may visually connect her with Eleonora's retinue by advertising a distinctively Spanish fashion endorsed by the duchess and her ladies, as depicted in other contemporary portraits, despite such accessories being largely frowned upon in Florence for the association of earrings with harlots in local custom.<sup>39</sup> Maria stands out as the only woman in Vasari's image with such an adornment.

Other elements of her costume do not correspond with either contemporary fashion or the archival records of Maria's usual sober attire. Over a rose-colored undershirt she wears a voluminous white gown, gathered at the hip like an ancient Greek *peplos*, and has a split breastplate that finishes in clasps at her shoulders. Rather than slippers or shoes, she wears red sandals with gold edging, which reveal her toes. Her blond hair is drawn up in thick intertwined

37 See Edelstein, "La fecundissima Signora duchessa," 83; and Cox-Rearick, "La Ill.ma Sig.ra Duchessa felice memoria," 252–53, who suggests this was motivated by a desire to downplay Eleonora's importance.

38 O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 82.

39 See Orsi Landini, *Moda a Firenze*, 37.



Figure 9.2 Female dwarf (possibly Maria), detail from Giorgio Vasari, *The Marriage of Catherine de' Medici to Henri, Duke of Orléans*, ca. 1556–62. Fresco, Sala di Clemente VII, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Photo: Raffaello Bencini/Bridgeman Images.

braids, through which a veil is looped that also covers her shoulders, and lappets from the veil cover her cheeks. On top of this, she wears a horn-shaped headdress ending in a scroll. These details of her costume might imply that Vasari's intention was to make Maria look as exotic as possible. However, they may instead be references to artworks recognizable to an elite Florentine audience, specifically, two drawings by Michelangelo Buonarroti.

Michelangelo's sketches of *Divine Heads*, produced around 1520–30, are among various drawings he gave as gifts to Gherardo Perini and Tommaso de' Cavalieri.<sup>40</sup> The subjects of these sketches are often female and are

40 See discussions in Hartt, *Drawings of Michelangelo*, 259–64. The drawings may have been intended as teaching tools to be copied by these protégés of Michelangelo.

usually depicted in profile with elaborately braided hairstyles and exotic headdresses, following artistic conventions on the representation of “ideal female beauty” established in the fifteenth century.<sup>41</sup> The sketch series revived interest in this earlier genre and influenced the work of Vasari and other contemporary artists, including Bronzino and Francesco Salviati.<sup>42</sup> Vasari refers to the *Divine Heads* given to Perini in his *Lives of the Artists* (1568), noting that three of these sketches had since been obtained by Francesco I de’ Medici “who treasures them as jewels.”<sup>43</sup> Two of Michelangelo’s drawings are of particular interest in relation to Vasari’s image of Maria in *Catherine’s Marriage*. The first is a drawing identified as *Zenobia*, one of the three sketches mentioned by Vasari and recorded in the ducal inventories by 1560–70 (figure 9.3).<sup>44</sup> The second is an unspecified *Ideal Head*, which may also have originally been a gift to Perini (figure 9.4).<sup>45</sup> The fact that several sixteenth-century copies of both images survive attests to their importance for contemporary artists, and Vasari’s depiction of Maria appears to combine elements from both. In Michelangelo’s drawings, *Zenobia* wears a similar horn-like headpiece and earring, and the *Ideal Head* includes cheek lappets and a veil wound into the ropes of hair, much like Maria’s hairstyle.

The subjects of the sketches also contribute to the symbolic connotations of Maria’s representation. The third-century Palmyrene Queen, *Zenobia*, an unusual subject in sixteenth-century artworks, was used as an exemplar of conjugal chastity. In the second drawing of the *Ideal Head*, the winged putto attached to the headpiece suggests that the figure may have been meant to represent Venus, the Virgin Mary, or a female saint.<sup>46</sup> In Vasari’s fresco, these associations with classical or biblical embodiments of ideal femininity are condensed into the small figure of Catherine’s dwarf attendant, thereby bestowing their attributes onto the Medici bride she accompanies. This

41 See further discussions in Pericolo, “Donna Bella e Crudele,” regarding both artistic and literary precedents.

42 See discussions in Joannides, *Michelangelo*, 35.

43 Vasari, *Lives* (Michelangelo), 4:174: “To Gherardo Perini, a Florentine noble, he gave some divine heads on three sheets in black haematite, which came into the hands of the most illustrious Don Francesco, prince of Florence, who treasures them as jewels, as they are.”

44 Pericolo, “Donna Bella e Crudele,” 206.

45 See Joannides, *Michelangelo*, 40–41, 44–45. The *Ideal Head*, now in the British Museum collection, can be traced to the Casa Buonarroti in Florence; however, Joannides notes that despite a lack of documentary evidence, as with the *Zenobia* sketch, Perini is likely to have been its original recipient.

46 See discussions in Joannides, *Michelangelo*, 40–41; and Hartt, *Drawings of Michelangelo*, 259.



Figure 9.3 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Zenobia*, ca. 1520–25. Black chalk on paper, 14.05 × 9.92 in. (35.7 × 25.2 cm), 598Er, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. Photo: Scala, Florence.



Figure 9.4 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Ideal Head of a Woman*, ca. 1525–28. Black chalk on paper, 11.02 × 8.97 in. (28 × 22.8 cm), 1895, 0915.493r, British Museum, London. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.

notion is reinforced by the physical connection between Catherine and the female dwarf, who is shown clutching the skirts of Catherine's bridal gown.

The emphasis on the figures' breasts via split breastplates or straps in some of the *Divine Heads*, including *Zenobia*, recalls the traditional costume for *Allegories of Abundance*, exemplified by Donatello's iconic fifteenth-century statue for the eponymous column in the old Florentine marketplace (ca. 1430–31).<sup>47</sup> Although, unlike *Zenobia*, her breasts are covered, the dwarf's similar chest ornament and billowing garment may likewise allude to this emblem of fecundity; however, Abundance's traditional attribute of an overflowing cornucopia has been assigned to another figure in the scene who, like Maria, stands out as distinct from the other individuals portrayed. Positioned to the right of Maria and Catherine, two scantily dressed figures observe the exchange of rings from a separate stone plinth in the foreground. Their unusual appearance and larger size suggest they were intended to serve an allegorical function. The male figure is a river god (possibly representing the Arno), and it is this character who carries the cornucopia, as a traditional attribute also assigned to river gods reflecting their function as fertility symbols via their provision of water. Such deities were also emblems of territorial power by representing geographic locations, appropriate in this instance to the alliance of Tuscany with France.<sup>48</sup> The other figure is a female deity whose quiver of arrows identifies her as Diana, goddess of the hunt, but also, more pertinently in this context, the protector of women in childbirth.<sup>49</sup> Both these characters are positioned on the bride's side of the image and, in combination with Maria, form a group of conspicuous symbols promoting fertility within the Medici marital alliance.

This visual alignment of a female dwarf with other overt fertility symbols may reflect the underlying folkloric belief in dwarfs and dwarf imagery as charms to deflect the *malocchio* (Evil Eye). Although this notion is not explicitly mentioned in sixteenth-century literature or medical treatises on women's health, the use of dwarf figures to ward off misfortune extended

47 See Pericolo's discussions on the female breastplates and cuirasses in Michelangelo's *Divine Heads* in "Donna Bella e Crudele," 220–22. Donatello's statue is now lost, though copies survive, such as the small terracotta figure by Giovanni della Robbia, ca. 1520, in the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

48 Else, *Politics of Water*, 180–82, discusses the function of river gods, noting that the sixteenth-century revival of this classical statuary type was particularly popular in Florence.

49 Diana's association with childbirth is noted by Cicero in *De natura deorum*, ii, 27, due to the cycles of the moon being used to measure the length of pregnancy in months; cited in Joubert, *Popular Errors* (1578), 3.2:146.

back to classical antiquity and continued in Europe into the modern age.<sup>50</sup> Considering the perils of childbirth during this period, every opportunity was taken to enhance the chances of survival for women and their infants by harnessing sympathetic magic in the form of charms, such as hollow aetite stones and parchment strips bearing sacred texts sewn into garments or worn about the person.<sup>51</sup> The idea that dwarfs may have fallen within this category of protective amulets, especially for women, appears to be reflected elsewhere in the visual record. Mantegna's female dwarf apparently acts as a guardian to the Gonzaga, by grasping her right forefinger in her left fist to make an obscene gesture similar to the *mano fico* hand sign, traditionally used to avert bad luck (see again figure I.10).<sup>52</sup> Along with her imperious gaze, this gesture may be intended to repel the Evil Eye away from the ducal family; however, her placement with the Gonzaga women, particularly her position directly in front of a marriageable daughter, may indicate that her apotropaic powers are especially deployed to protect female members of the family from misfortune and safeguard their future fertility.

In the case of Maria serving this function in Vasari's fresco of Catherine de' Medici's marriage, she is not the only dwarf to appear in Medici imagery as a putative bridal charm. It is notable that several male dwarfs who feature in dynastic commemorations of subsequent Medici marriages are visually aligned with the bride rather than with the groom. In Jacopo Ligozzi's painting of *Francesco de' Medici's Marriage to Giovanna of Austria* (ca. 1623–27?) a male dwarf is positioned on the bridal side carrying a posy of flowers, while in Domenico Passignano's *Marriage Banquet of Ferdinando I to Christine of Lorraine* (ca. 1590) a male dwarf stands at the corner of the table as he proposes a toast to the new bride.<sup>53</sup> A more intimate pictorial connection between dwarf and bride is on display in another depiction of the *Marriage of Catherine de' Medici*, attributed to Francesco Bianchi Bonavita (ca. 1627).

50 See discussions in Wace, "Grotesques and the Evil Eye," 109–10; and Welsford, *The Fool*, 61–62. Also, Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, dictionary entry for *gobbo* (hunchback dwarf), 6:945, which notes the popular belief that they are lucky charms.

51 See discussions on the use of charms in Musacchio, *Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, chapter 5, 125–47, including aetite stones and prayers, especially to the Virgin Mary or Saint Margaret (patron saint of women in childbirth), wound into garments or worn in *brevi* (small pouches), 140–43.

52 See O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies," 258–60 and the Introduction to this volume.

53 Passignano's painting is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna; for Ligozzi's painting in the Mari-Cha Collection, Hong Kong, see <https://www.akg-images.com/archive/The-Marriage-of-Francesco-de-Medici-and-Joanna-of-Austria-2UMDHUNQSIC8.html>.

In this painting, Maria's place is taken by a male dwarf who holds the train of Catherine's gown.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

Contrary to the more conventional perception of court dwarfs as "jester-buffoons," the archival sources reveal that Maria functioned as a diminutive ladies' maid in Eleonora's personal retinue, who was entrusted with handling substantial financial transactions and who was able to interact with the wider male-oriented world of the court while conducting the duchess's private business. Given the physical segregation of aristocratic women and their households during the sixteenth century, such freedom may suggest that Maria's "Otherness" as a dwarf afforded her greater public access than was generally permitted to Eleonora's female attendants, her moral probity not in question or perhaps viewed to be less at risk from unwarranted male attention.

Without definitive evidence it is only possible to speculate that Maria is the female dwarf represented in the fresco illustrating Catherine de' Medici's marriage; however, as she was apparently the only female dwarf in the Florentine court at the time, she is a likely candidate. Just as Vasari appears to have used Cosimo's dwarf Gradasso as a model for Henri's attendant, he may likewise have sought inspiration for his female dwarf among Eleonora's entourage, thereby adding his patrons' visual stamp to the image via their diminutive envoys. While both dwarfs function as markers of Medici nobility, the artist's differing approaches to the portrayal of the male and female dwarf may further reveal contemporary attitudes towards women. Gradasso is dressed as a member of the princely court and memorialized in the *Ragionamenti* as a named individual from Cosimo's retinue, whereas Maria's personal identity is deemed to be of little consequence. Instead, Vasari's depiction of Eleonora's otherwise soberly dressed attendant as a miniature *Zenobia* has a symbolic function in the commemoration of this significant dynastic alliance. By alluding to the exemplars of ideal femininity in Michelangelo's sketches and possibly also exploiting the talismanic quality of dwarfs as charms against misfortune, the small female figure plays an important iconographical role in promoting and protecting the outcome of the Medici-Valois union.

54 For the image see: <https://www.agg-images.com/archive/Wedding-of-Catherine-de-Medici-with-Henri--Duke-of-Orleans-2UMDHUNT7DNM.html>.



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## 10. Dwarfs and Giants in Early Modern Caricature

*Sandra Cheng*

### Abstract

Seventeenth-century sources defined the new genre of *caricatura* as a playful portrait that exaggerated a person's flaws. Physical shortcomings, such as large noses and weak chins were distorted to poke fun at the sitter. In the life of Baccio del Bianco, the biographer connected the production of caricature to drawings of *caramogi* (hunchbacked dwarfs), which appeared as frequent subjects in Florentine comic drawings. Early modern caricatures featured dwarf figures, which were not actual portraits but fantastic images that manipulated features for comic effect. Comparable to modern cartoonists, early caricaturists played with scale to allude to the dwarf-giant topoi to produce a funnier image. This chapter examines how early caricaturists used non-normative bodies as a visual strategy to create satirical imagery.

**Keywords:** Carracci School, monstrosity, *caramogi*, cartoon, scale, comic imagery

During the early modern period, caricature emerged as a genre that made possible the exploration of the comic and the grotesque in draftsmanship. Many caricatures featured dwarfs, and the occasional giant, which served as visual topoi of extreme contrasts to heighten the comic effect of an image. Caricatures were first referred to as *ritratti ridicoli* (ridiculous portraits) in a manuscript by Giulio Mancini (1559–1630), an art critic and physician in seventeenth-century Rome. Mancini described caricature as a drawing that exaggerated a subject's "natural defects," flaws that were already



Figure 10.1 Agostino Carracci, *Studies and Sketches for Figures*. Pen and ink, 27.2 × 19.8 cm (10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in). Bequest of Harry G. Sperling, 1971, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in the public domain.

present and selectively fine-tuned for comic effect.<sup>1</sup> The biographer Filippo Baldinucci (1624–1696), one of the earliest writers to document the practice of caricature, defined the new genre of *caricatura* in his *Vocabolario toscano dell'arte del disegno* (Tuscan Vocabulary of the Art of Drawing, 1681) as a playful portrait that disproportionately increased imperfections.<sup>2</sup> Physical flaws, whether a large nose or a weak chin, were distorted to poke fun at the sitter. The features of non-normative bodies, including hunchbacks, the

1 Mancini, *Considerazioni*, 135–36.

2 “[...] aggravando o crescendo i difetti delle parti imitate sproporzionatamente”; Baldinucci, *Vocabolario toscano*, 111. For an overview of the early reception of caricature, see Berra, “Il ritratto ‘caricato in forma strana,’” 80–85.

lame (*zoppi*), and dwarfs, were appropriated as comic strategy to produce ridiculous portraits. Height, in deficiency or excess, was an easy feature for artists to manipulate to create humorous interpretations of their subjects, a pictorial maneuver that plays into the contemporary societal obsessions with giants and dwarfs.

## Drawing and Play in the Carracci Academy

Caricature was part of the Carracci Academy's innovative curriculum to develop draftsmanship, which included pictorial games and drawing from life.<sup>3</sup> Founded in 1582 by Agostino, Annibale, and Ludovico Carracci, their Accademia degli Incamminati (Academy of Those Who Are Making Progress) promoted a new approach to artistic training that was infused with play, attracting artists from young apprentices to older journeymen to their school.<sup>4</sup> Guido Reni (1575–1642) and Francesco Albani (1578–1660), two of the Carracci's pupils, claimed “one could not help but make progress under the Carracci, because studying in their school was done for fun, and learning was a matter of play.”<sup>5</sup> The spirit of *lusus* is evident in the use of playful, graphic exercises that helped enhance creativity and dexterity, such as one-line drawings produced without lifting pen from paper.<sup>6</sup> A study sheet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art illustrates the variety of graphic modalities practiced within the academy. Typical of Carracci School studies, especially those by Agostino, the sheet is crowded with fragmentary heads and limbs sketched around a standing male nude (figure 10.1). The drawing has grotesque and comic elements, including the animal head with baubles dangling from the ears at the bottom and a caricature of a hooded man along the right edge. A similar sheet of studies by Agostino at Windsor Castle

3 The Carracci's role and impact on stylistic changes in painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is documented at length in Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci*, 1977; Feigenbaum, “Drawing and Collaboration,” 145–55; and Robertson, *Invention of Annibale Carracci*, 68–77.

4 The academy, originally called the Accademia dei Desiderosi (Academy of the Desirous Ones) was a combination school and fledgling workshop in Bologna; see Dempsey, *Carracci Academy*, 32. On the artists who were attracted to the novelty offered by Carracci studio, see Robertson, *Invention of Annibale Carracci*, 70–71.

5 “[C]h'era impossibile il non far profitto sotto i Carracci, studiandosi in quella scuola per ischerzo ed imparandovisi per giuoco”; Malvasia *Felsina pittrice*, 1:338 with translation in Summerscale, *Life of the Carracci*, 274.

6 DeGrazia, “Agostino come inventore,” 102. Examples of a Carracci drawing executed in a single line include Windsor inv. 1836; Darmstadt inv. AE1494; Stockholm inv. 915/1863 recto-916/1863 verso, 1019/1863.

features several comic elements, including a diminutive comic vignette and a caricature of a courtier type with hat in hand.<sup>7</sup> The head of this figure is repeated in schematic form with several adjustments, providing insight into the Carracci's approach to producing comic imagery. On the full-length figure, the proportion of the small head to chest and legs exaggerates the dwarf-like stature of the caricature. To the right are sketches of the head with an elongated shape that feature a dark brow, bulbous nose, goatee, and beard. The other sketches demonstrate how Agostino abandoned the long head for an even more distorted one that is compressed to create a wider, fatter face with deeply furrowed, cartoon-like brows. The different sketches suggest Agostino decided to make the caricature more comical by transforming his target into a dwarf.

Ernst Gombrich noted the manipulation of scale as one of the most powerful tools in a cartoonist's graphic arsenal.<sup>8</sup> Numerous drawings by the Carracci and their followers display the playful manipulation of scale to add humor to imagery, at times transforming their subjects into dwarfs. A Carracci School drawing in the National Museum, Stockholm depicts the dwarf singers Rabbatin de Gniffi with his wife Spilla Pomina (figure 10.2). The comic inscription highlights the wife's passionate nature and jealousy. The figures are rendered with grotesque expressions, Rabbatin's mouth open wide in song, his wife clutching him with concern. Though a school drawing, the example demonstrates that the Carracci's representations of dwarfs as comic figures was a strategy they implemented and shared with their students. Several comic drawings of dwarf figures by Agostino and Annibale show them often resorting to distorting scale for satirical effect. One example by Agostino at Windsor Castle depicts a dwarf with an impish grin.<sup>9</sup> The face and costume are carefully rendered in red chalk with white highlights to accentuate the length of the costume and its long row of buttons that emphasize the diminutive stature of the bent figure.

Giants appear in few surviving examples of early modern caricature though their presence is implied in the appearance of monumental figures and objects in capricious imagery, often set in the outdoors. Comparable

7 Wittkower dated the drawings on the recto and verso to 1590; *Drawings of the Carracci*, cat. nos. 95 and 131. For the image, see the verso of inv. no. RCIN 901755 at Windsor: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/901755/the-return-of-the-prodigal-son>.

8 Gombrich identifies six important tools for producing cartoons, including the "power of contrasts"; "Cartoonist's Armoury," 127–42, specifically 141–42.

9 For the image, see inv. no. RCIN 902219 at Windsor: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/15/collection/902219/>. The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (formerly in the Oppé Collection) has another study of a dwarf by Agostino executed in red chalk, inv. no. D5676.



Figure 10.2 Circle of Agostino Carracci, *Singing Dwarf with His Wife*. Pen and ink, 24.4 × 17.6 cm (9 5/8 × 6 15/16 in). National Museum, Stockholm. Art-work in the public domain.

to the popularity of grotesque statuary in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century gardens, artists manipulated scale to deform and produce humor. Although not a caricature, Stefano della Bella's 1653 print of Giambologna's personification of the Apennine Mountains in the gardens of the Medici villa at Pratolino demonstrates how giants enhanced the whimsical appeal of an image (figure 10.3)<sup>10</sup> In this bucolic scene, the juxtaposition of the craggy, earthbound giant towering over visitors to the fountain proved so entertaining a vision that the plate continued to be printed into the eighteenth century. Luke Morgan has analyzed the connection between giants and the monstrous in landscape, highlighting the appeal of ambiguity in the "colossal mode."<sup>11</sup> This same ambiguity is at work in a drawing by Agostino now at Windsor Castle that depicts a fantastical scene of artists

10 On Stefano's prints of the villa at Pratolino, see Massar, *Presenting Stefano della Bella*, 31–35.

11 Morgan, *Monster in the Garden*, 115–34.





Figure 10.3 Stefano della Bella, *Colossal Statue of the Appennino*, from *Views of Villa di Pratolino*. Etching, 10  $\frac{3}{16}$   $\times$  15  $\frac{1}{8}$  in (25.8  $\times$  38.4 cm). Bequest of Phyllis Massar, 2011, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in the public domain.

sketching a giant bust in the outdoors.<sup>12</sup> The humor lies in the juxtaposition of the tiny figures to the monumental bust, as well as the exchange of looks between artist and giant. One of the draftsmen is seated on the ground and tilts his head back to better assess the full scale of the giant who glares back with indignance. The contrast of absurd scale of monumental objects in natural settings is a playful motif visible in other fantasy views sketched by the Carracci and their followers, including Annibale's mountain scene with a broad cartoon-like smile shown upon a rising sun and a colossal vase that overshadows small figures in a cityscape by Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri, 1581–1641).<sup>13</sup> These drawings reveal how scale is manipulated to allude to the topoi of dwarfs and giants in order to produce comic imagery.

12 The drawing is inv. no. RCIN 901913 at Windsor: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/10/collection/901913/the-colossus-of-rhodos>. Wittkower suggested the massive figure is a possible study for the Colossus of Rhodes, the legendary monumental statue of the sun god Helios. However, Agostino's giant shares no similarity to other depictions of the classical giant; *Drawings of the Carracci*, cat. no. 229, 127. Compare to Maerten van Heemskerck's drawing for the Colossus of Rhodes (1570) in the Courtauld (inv. no. D.1952.RW.648), which was the model for a popular print in the series "The Eight Wonders of the World."

13 Annibale's *Landscape with a Smiling Sun* is in the Louvre, inv. no. 7485; Domenichino's *Male Figure Standing Beside an Urn* is in Windsor Castle, inv. no. RCIN 901532 (with a copy in the Louvre, inv. no. 7454). Similarly, the school drawing in the Louvre of *Artists Sketching a Giant* depicts a ruined landscape with a fragment of a colossal statue upon the ground (inv. no. 7453).

Early modern caricature's emphasis on misshapen forms and aberrations, including dwarfs and giants, corresponded with the contemporary interest in curiosities, notably monsters.<sup>14</sup> The *Wunderkammer*, housing collections of rare objects produced by natural or artificial means—precious gems, unusual fauna, and mummified creatures—exemplified the culture of curiosity. Publications on monsters flourished and the perception of monstrosity shifted from a sign of prodigious omen to evidence of Nature's wonder. The Carracci were likely aware of the popularity of marvels described and illustrated in monster histories, which may have even informed their approach to consider the dialectics of beauty and ugliness, or harmony and dissonance, through the lens of monstrosity. In the caricature exercises, artists selected natural defects and exaggerated such imperfections for delight, a process that was comparable to the way monsters were presented in contemporary publications to evoke marvel.

## Dwarfs in Caricature

Caricatures by the Carracci and their followers often used dwarf bodies, which coincided with cultural perceptions of the dwarf as a creature that was both comical and monstrous.<sup>15</sup> Early modern dwarf imagery reflected their shifting functions and symbolism that varied from Agnolo Bronzino's astonishing portrait of the Medici dwarf Morgante to Jacques Callot's whimsical prints of *gobbi* (deformed dwarfs).<sup>16</sup> The presence of dwarfs across many European courts confirmed that they served as status symbols within court society throughout the early modern period, yet their increasingly frequent appearance in burlesque literature and imagery make it evident that the dwarf was also regarded as a comic figure.<sup>17</sup> During a twelve-year sojourn in Italy, Callot witnessed dwarfs at the Medici court and in public spectacles.<sup>18</sup> His renowned *Varie Figure Gobbi* (1616) series featuring hunchback dwarfs

14 On the connection between caricature and the interest in monstrosity, see Cheng, "Cult of the Monstrous," 197–231.

15 For a nuanced analysis of the changing reception of the dwarf as a monstrous figure during the sixteenth century, see O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies," 253–88.

16 On Bronzino's portrait of Morgante, see O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 80–105; for Callot, see Tempesti, "Callot et Stefano della Bella," 483–510.

17 O'Bryan discusses dwarfs as status symbols in "Grotesque Bodies," 254–55. The court dwarf held a precarious position as both subject and object, collected and traded by European aristocracy; see Ghadessi, "Inventoried Monsters," 267–81.

18 Russell, *Jacques Callot*, 78.



Figure 10.4 Stefano della Bella, *Dwarfs Playing a Ball Game*. Pencil, pen and ink, and wash, 17.1 × 26.7 cm (16 ¾ × 10 ½ in). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Artwork in the public domain.

making music or armed to fight inspired a Florentine tradition of dwarf prints and even caricatures by artists in the service of the Medici, most notably Stefano della Bella and Baccio del Bianco (1604–1657).<sup>19</sup>

Della Bella's drawing of dwarfs at play serves as an example of the popular use of the dwarf figure as comic subject in the seventeenth century (figure 10.4).<sup>20</sup> This sheet is one of twenty-three drawings that share similar themes, which the artist likely had planned to produce as prints, but the project was never published.<sup>21</sup> In the illustration, teams of dwarfs face off against each other in a game of *pallone* on a long stretch of road lined with trees on the left, and a high wall on the right. In the foreground one dwarf holds the ball as though he were about to make a move; beyond him in the center, a knock-kneed dwarf stretches out his arms ready to catch any ball that comes his way. In the lower right-hand corner, a dwarf uses a syringe to inflate another ball. Dwarf spectators, shown lounging and standing by the

19 Gregori, "Nuovi accertamenti in Toscana," 400–16. On caricature and Florentine dwarf imagery, see Cheng, "Parodies of Life," 127–41, and Russell, *Jacques Callot*, 130.

20 This drawing is similar to several sheets that were formerly in the Oppé Collection, now in the British Museum, which appear to emphasize themes of education or play; see Viatte, "Allegorical and Burlesque Drawings," 354–62.

21 Four other drawings in this series are illustrated in Viatte, *ibid.*, fig. 13. On Stefano's earlier print series of dwarf subjects, see Cheng, "Parodies of Life," 132.

trees, look on as the players prepare to resume the game.<sup>22</sup> Another drawing in the series at the British Museum depicts dwarf school children with a headmaster shown reprimanding a tearful student, although he appears to have little authority over the chaotic classroom filled with children talking, sleeping, and climbing the tables.<sup>23</sup> The disparity in scale between the dwarfs and the grotesquely hunchbacked teacher, who if he stood up would tower over his charges with his height and bulk, plays on the visual contrast of dwarfism and gigantism to add to the humorous effect of the image.

*Caramogi* (grotesque, hunchbacked dwarfs) featured prominently in drawings by Baccio del Bianco, who was in the employ of the Medici court until Grand Duke Ferdinando II (r. 1621–70) sent him into the service of Spain's Philip IV in 1650.<sup>24</sup> The Tuscan artist played a central role in the development of caricature as a genre, as supported by Baldinucci who discussed caricature at length in only two biographies of his *Notizie*, that of Gianlorenzo Bernini published in 1682, and later in the life of Baccio in 1685.<sup>25</sup> Baldinucci drew a connection between invention, comic themes, *caramogi*, and caricature. The biographer highlighted Baccio's gift of *invenzione* within this unique comic mode, writing "what Baccio really excelled in, where his talent was perhaps even unique, was in inventing and jotting down in pen and ink funny little stories, dwarferies, and caricatures of people, which made everyone who saw them nearly die laughing."<sup>26</sup> Baccio's *caramogi* subjects are whimsical with elements of the fantastic that poke fun at laborers, doctors, and artists by transforming these characters into deformed and monstrous beings.

Dwarfs are featured in many of Baccio's drawings, which as well as functioning as caricatures, are sometimes described as *capricci*. The *capriccio*, a fantasy drawing that displays the artist's creativity and *invenzione*, developed in parallel with caricature over the course of the seventeenth century.<sup>27</sup> One of Baccio's burlesque drawings featuring carnival figures shows dancers striking poses similar to the festival figures appearing in

22 On ball games and the sociability of spectatorship, see O'Bryan, "Introduction: A Passion for Games," 30, 46–52.

23 Inv. no. 2017,7035.1 in the British Museum: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_2017-7035-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2017-7035-1).

24 For Baccio's career in theater production, especially during his time in Spain, see Massar's "Scenes for a Calderon Play," 365–75; and Thielman, "Baccio del Bianco at the Court of Spain."

25 Baldinucci's biography of Bernini is contained in *Notizie*, 5:583–700; that of Baccio del Bianco is in *Notizie*, 5:16–51.

26 Translated by Rice in "Cardinal Rapaccioli and the Turnip-sellers," 53–56; cf. Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno*, 5:31.

27 White argues convincingly that the Carracci's graphic innovations were precedents for the development of *capricci*; *Serio Ludere*, 37–73.



Figure 10.5 Baccio del Bianco, *Carnival Figures*. Red chalk, 14 × 28.7 cm (5 7/16 × 11 5/16 in). The Leonora Hall Gurley Memorial Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago. Artwork in the public domain.

Callot's and della Bella's prints (figure 10.5). Watching on behind them is a squat dwarf wearing an oversized hat and bearing weapons that are disproportionately large for his small stature. Baccio also did drawings which were highly finished in colored wash, possibly produced as gifts for friends who would understand the visual jokes. One of these works features an artist's studio with several grotesque dwarfs.<sup>28</sup> The painter seated at the easel has a small, pointed nose, a dimple, and a rounded chin, which I believe to be a self-portrait of Baccio himself, since the same delicate features are comparable to a self-portrait in a satirical drawing on the War of Castro.<sup>29</sup> At the center of the studio are two models, a *caramogio* with wild yellow curls, his hunchback clearly visible, is seated atop a squatting deformed figure, which is a large-sized dwarf; here Baccio makes a mocking juxtaposition of the miniature and the gigantic.<sup>30</sup> The blond dwarf holds aloft a stick with a

28 As noted by other scholars, the drawing shares strong thematic and stylistic characteristics with the artist's graphic production, notably a series of caricature drawings in Florence's Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale. The drawing is inv. no. WA1863.697 at the Ashmolean, Oxford University: <https://images.ashmolean.org/search/?searchQuery=WA1863.697>. Formerly attributed to Faustino Bocchi, this drawing, along with three others in the collection, was reattributed to Baccio by Marco Chiarini and Manuela Kahn-Rossi; see Brooks, *Graceful and True*, 53, cat. no. 8, n. 2, and Kahn-Rossi, "Le rôle de Jacques Callot," 267. Many of the caricatures in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale are reproduced in Kahn-Rossi, *Ritratti in Barocco*.

29 The drawing featured dwarfs as well as a figure identified as Baccio's friend, the painter Francesco Furini. For more on this image, see Rice, "Cardinal Rapaccioli and the Turnip-sellers," 59–60.

30 This is in line with the famed Medici dwarf Morgante, who was named after the giant in Luigi Pulci's mock-heroic poem.

skewered cucumber or gherkin, as nearby a dwarf seated on a stool placed on top of a book for added height, sketches the models with a red-tipped brush. On the extreme right, a figure in buffoonish costume stands on tiptoe to look through a telescope that is trained on the cucumber. The theatricality of the studio scene underscores Baccio's involvement with theater production for the Medici.

Perception is the playful theme, and sight is mediated through devices that magnify the miniscule, such as the telescope and oversized glasses seen in Baccio's other drawings. In Medici circles, the telescope signifies the family's connection to Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), the infamous astronomer who was denounced by the Church for his pro-Copernican views. The device also alludes to Baccio's personal ties to Galileo and Vincenzo Viviani, the astronomer's last disciple and amanuensis.<sup>31</sup> According to Baldinucci, Grand Duke Ferdinando II held a competition in 1642, the year of Galileo's death, among *spiritosi pittori* (witty painters) to determine who could produce the best painting of the spots on the moon (*quelle maravigliose macchie*) as viewed through a Galilean telescope. Baccio, a gifted draftsman who was well acquainted with the instrument (Baldinucci even reported that he witnessed Baccio operating a telescope) won the competition.<sup>32</sup> In the drawing, the telescope serves as an allusion to the artist's own scientific interests as well as a visual play on looking, specifically looking with the use of optical aids, which is not natural vision but *contra natura* (against nature)—like the bodies of dwarfs and *gobbi*. As with other of Baccio's comic drawings, this one also contains lewd or scatological humor. On the right, the grotesque figure looking through the telescope has a dripping nose. According to Jean Toscan, the dripping mucus serves as a metaphor for a flaccid penis.<sup>33</sup> Further, the telescope is focused on yet another phallic symbol, the *centriolo* (gherkin). The combination of artificial viewing devices along with the phallic and anal references make comic allusions to sodomy. The bird (*uccello*) sitting on the easel and paintbrush (*pennello*) are metaphors for the phallus.<sup>34</sup> On the paintbrush held by the *caramogio*, the brush tip is angled up rather than pointed down to paper, and it is placed near the rear end of the

31 Galileo was confined to a villa in Arcetri near Florence, which is where Baccio may have encountered him when he sought Galileo's advice on the mechanics of some theatrical devices. Baldinucci included excerpts of entertaining banter between the two men; *Notizie*, 5:35.

32 *Ibid.*, 5:31.

33 At the suggestion of Robin O'Bryan, I have consulted Toscan's *Le carnaval du langage* to look more closely at the erotic and obscene symbolism of the objects in this drawing.

34 *Ibid.*, 4:1762 and 1729 respectively.

*caramogio* holding the cucumber. The pairs of *calze* (shoes) hanging off the easel are euphemisms for open orifices, in particular the anus.<sup>35</sup> The sexual metaphors to the artistic space are intentionally bawdy to add another layer of humor to the image.<sup>36</sup>

Resembling Baccio's parody of the artist's studio, comic drawings by the Carracci followers use dwarf figures to poke fun at types, including singers, cobblers, and street characters who frequent the public space of the piazza. The Carracci Academy's interest in sketching the scenes of everyday life is exemplified by Annibale's series of itinerant tradesmen and laborers, known today as *Le Arti di Bologna* (The Trades of Bologna).<sup>37</sup> Although the drawings were used in the studio for instruction they were likely intended as a print series (which only materialized when the Frenchman Simon Guillain produced the etchings for publication in 1646).<sup>38</sup> In Malvasia's biography, the *Arti* drawings were discussed in relation to the other pictorial games, including the *pittorici divinarelli* (pictorial riddles) and caricature.<sup>39</sup> The association suggests the tradesmen drawings were considered amusing images, which the Carracci used for teaching purposes in their new academy.<sup>40</sup>

Drawings by the Carracci followers indicate that their students continued to produce caricatures and likely shared the practice with their own apprentices. Akin to Agostino's earlier study sheets, the caricatures are not necessarily ridiculous portraits of known sitters, but rather some are caricatures of types. Several caricatures by Albani, one of the Carracci's celebrated pupils, feature typical characters found in the public square, including a vignette of street musicians presented as dwarfs. A drawing in the British Museum features a group of dwarf musicians with several physically

35 Ibid., 4:1673.

36 For an overview of the use of produce as sexual metaphors in early modern Rome, see Varriano, "Fruits and Vegetables as Sexual Metaphor," 8–14.

37 For the history of the drawings, see Marabottini's introduction to a modern edition of the *Arti di Bologna* (1979). It is important to note that the introduction to the *Diverse figure*, one of the two editions of the *Arti* prints, included the first published theory on caricature by Giovanni Antonio Massani (writing under the pseudonym Giovanni Atanasio Mosini). Malvasia borrows this discussion of caricature nearly word for word in the *Felsina pittrice*; see Murawska-Muthesius, "Company of Artists," 5–7.

38 McTighe provides an overview of the two 1646 editions of the prints in "Perfect Deformity," 75–91, especially 76–7.

39 Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:335.

40 On the drawings of trades within the Carracci Academy, see Saporì, *Il Libro dei Mestieri di Bologna*, 95–125.



Figure 10.6 Jusepe de Ribera, *Man Wearing a Large Cloak and a Small Naked Man on His Head*, ca. 1637–40. Pen and ink, brush, and brown wash,  $8\frac{3}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{16}$  in. (21.2 × 10.0 cm). Harry G. Sperling Fund, 1981, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in the public domain.

deformed onlookers in the audience.<sup>41</sup> The figure at the center carries a stringed instrument that rivals him in size. The audience is composed of courtier types presented satirically with thin extended legs or diminutive bodies with heads larger than their torsos. As with the example by Albani, later caricatures by Carracci School artists exhibit differences that indicate a shift in function, from purely pedagogy to more satirical imagery that ridicules social classes. Moving away from the study-sheet quality of Agostino's early drawings, the caricatures exhibit a more narrative structure while using the same reliable strategies of manipulating contrasts of scale for more comedic impact.

41 The drawing is inv. no. 1946,0713.655 at the British Museum: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1946-0713-655](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1946-0713-655). Albani used a similar strategy of presenting characters such as singers and alchemists as dwarfs in other caricatures. Harris drew attention to Albani as a caricaturist in "Some Chalk Drawings by Francesco Albani," 155, n. 23. On this caricature and a possible connection to a set of drawings now housed in Berlin's Kupferstichkabinett, see Turner, "Some thoughts on Francesco Albani," 495–96.



## Lampooning the Art Market

Lilliputian people are seen climbing atop larger figures in several enigmatic drawings by Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652), the Spanish painter and printmaker who had come to Italy around 1608.<sup>42</sup> Ribera had an affinity for Leonardo's grotesque studies and produced multiple monstrous figures in drawings and prints.<sup>43</sup> One of his drawings done in Rome depicts a small, naked man waving a flag and sitting on the head of a large, cloaked figure (figure 10.6). Though not a representation of a dwarf nor a giant, the juxtaposition recalls a quote attributed to Bernard of Chartres that “modern men are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants.”<sup>44</sup> As Andrea Bayer has noted “the contrast between the very tall and the very short” is a topos of caricature, which is evident here in this illustration used for satirical intent. Other aspects of difference add to the comic effect, including the contrast of nude vs. clothed, and the choppy lines of the small figure compared to the smooth strokes of line and wash below.

Ribera's drawing has been interpreted widely, but a clue to its meaning is found in the name “Niccolò Simonelli” inscribed on the banner held by the tiny figure mounted on the “giant's” head.<sup>45</sup> Simonelli (d. 1671), an influential art dealer in Rome, was a friend of many artists who drew caricatures, including Ribera, Pier Francesco Mola (1612–1666), and Salvator Rosa (1615–1673). His reputation as a connoisseur was noted by contemporary writers, including Giovan Pietro Bellori and Francesco Scanelli, yet others alluded to the darker side of this influential intermediary between artists and patrons.<sup>46</sup> The Lucchese painter Pietro Testa (1612–1650) complained bitterly of Simonelli's avarice in a letter that included a comic drawing of King Midas, a legendary symbol of greed.<sup>47</sup> Mola produced a series of satirical caricatures filled with erotic and scatological imagery that poked fun at Simonelli's pretensions.<sup>48</sup> Though Ribera's image is puzzling, given the context of Simonelli's aspirations in the art market and his fraught relationships with contemporary artists, his caricature functions as a subtle

42 See Farina, “Ribera's ‘Satirical Portrait of a Nun,’” 4757. Other similar examples are in the Prado, Madrid (inv. no. Doo8743) and Philadelphia Museum of Art (inv. no. 1984-56-8).

43 See Bambach, “New Ribera Drawing,” 52–53; and Payne, “Ribera's Grotesque Heads,” 85–103.

44 Bayer, “Note on Ribera's Drawing,” 73.

45 Marqués proposes that the drawing may be a study for a frontispiece of a scientific treatise; *Jusepe de Ribera*, cat. no. 114, 224–25. Bayer notes that the tall figure shares characteristics with other representations of Simonelli, including Giovanni Maria Morandi's painted portrait; “Note on Ribera's Drawing,” 73.

46 Bayer, “Note on Ribera's Drawing,” 74–76.

47 Ibid., 74.

48 Davis, “Pier Francesco Mola's Autobiographical Caricatures,” 49–50.



Figure 10.7 Pier Francesco Mola, *The Connoisseurs*. Pen and brown ink,  $9 \frac{3}{8} \times 7 \frac{5}{16}$  in (23.9 × 18.5 cm). Gift of János Scholz, 1985.90. The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

poke at the increasingly powerful art dealer, who was one of a rising class of amateurs who were typically not trained in the arts, but who wielded significant influence in artistic matters.<sup>49</sup>

As with his caricatures mocking Simonelli, Mola satirized this rising class of amateur dealers who exercised undue control within the contemporary art world, often using a contrast of scale, placing small, dwarf-like figures next to taller characters. This is the technique he used in his drawing parodying connoisseurship that depicts a dwarf standing atop a chair to look closely at a painting (figure 10.7).<sup>50</sup> A tall, thin figure, a giant in comparison, leans over the dwarf to peer at the painting. The painting on the easel depicts the half-length figure of an astronomer or cosmographer holding a pair of dividers. Brushes and a palette appear abandoned on the floor under the easel as if the painter left in a hurry. It is unclear whether the connoisseurs are examining a work in progress or a picture for sale; nor is it clear whether they admire or dislike the painting. Mola painted numerous versions of

49 Patrons sought the advice and assistance of these connoisseurs to acquire works of art and help shape their personal collections.

50 Harris questions the attribution to Mola in "Reviews of Pier Francesco Mola," 221.

half-length pictures of philosophers from antiquity, and using this genre as an example in the caricature suggests the artist may have been making a point about the current market. Like many painters, Mola worked both on commission and for the free market since it was a challenge to attain positions as court artists.<sup>51</sup> His livelihood was thus dependent on the whims of the connoisseur, here characterized as an incongruous pair of odd-looking men who share a taste for pretension.

Writing about cartoons in the twentieth century, Gombrich noted how the cartoonist relied on certain formulae to communicate visually. For Gombrich, a key tactic is the “contrast of scales” for it is recognized as a “universally intelligible metaphor.”<sup>52</sup> As demonstrated in the drawings discussed in this chapter, this comic strategy was in use during the period when caricature developed into an independent genre. Early caricature mirrored the society lampooned in burlesque literature, a world turned upside down, full of deformity and ugliness, and extreme paradoxes. The absurdity of contradictions was lauded in the popular poetry of Giulio Cesare Croce (1550–1609) to the courtly writings of Margherita Costa (1600–1657) and visualized by early modern caricaturists.<sup>53</sup> Pictorial caricatures exhibited a parallel kind of play to literary parodies, drawing attention to the novel and experimental graphic form while putting on display the artist’s inventive wit.

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51 Cavazzini, “Pier Francesco Mola tra le corti e il mercato,” 213.

52 Gombrich, “Cartoonist’s Armoury,” 142.

53 On Margherita Costa’s comic approach, see Goethals, “Bizarre Muse,” 52–60.

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## 11. “Biancone”: Giants, Dwarfs, and the Rise of a Popular Nickname

*Felicia Else*

### Abstract

Colossal statues like Michelangelo's David were often referred to as “il Gigante” (the Giant), a genre tied to heroic ancient traditions. One Florentine “Gigante,” Bartolomeo Ammannati's *Neptune* (1560–74) in the Piazza della Signoria, suffered criticism for its aesthetic shortcomings and acquired a popular nickname, “Biancone,” translated as “Big White One” (or “Giant Whitey”). This paper will trace its appearance in Lorenzo Lippi's *Il Malmantile Racquistato* (1676) where “Biancone” appears as an anti-hero, conquered and subjected to indignities. Lippi's work drew on earlier traditions that celebrated the vulgar, the grotesque, and the carnivalesque, pairing giants and dwarfs for comic effect. As statue and literary character, “Biancone” presents a colorful and humorous case study in the dynamics of Florentine public sculpture.

**Keywords:** Bartolomeo Ammannati, *Neptune Fountain*, Lorenzo Lippi, *Malmantile Racquistato*, mock heroic, colossal statues

A giant among giants, Bartolomeo Ammannati's *Neptune* stands as the centerpiece of a sumptuous fountain (1560–74) in the Piazza della Signoria of Florence (figures 11.1–11.3). Colossal statues such as this, like Michelangelo's celebrated *David* set up originally in this same piazza, were often referenced by just the term *gigante*.<sup>1</sup> Ammannati's Olympian deity of the waters was

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. Battista notes that “The formal admiration was such that no one spoke of David but only of ‘Gigante’”; “La critica,” 118. Also see Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals*, 122, who discusses the genre in the context of artistic rivalry. Ammannati's statue was referenced as *il gigante* or *gigante Nettuno* in a variety of documents, including payment records now in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, diary entries by Agostino Lapini and



carved from a single white marble block, the largest of its time and a revival of an ancient and highly esteemed genre of sculpture that showcased the technical skill of the artist and the monumental ambitions and power of a patron.<sup>2</sup> However, its negative reception over the ages proves that bigger is not always better. While it was not the only statue in the piazza to be mocked by its public, it enjoys the dubious honor of having a catchy and popular nickname: “Biancone” (translated literally as “Big White One”, colloquially as “Big Whitey”). The very word employs the augmentative suffix *-one* with *bianco*, turning largeness and whiteness on their heads and using the term “Biancone” as a satirical critique. This study investigates the earliest known printed appearance of this nickname in Lorenzo Lippi’s *Il Malmantile Racquistato* (The Castle Malmantile Regained, 1676), a mock-heroic epic that highlights words and phrases from the Florentine vernacular.<sup>3</sup> Here and elsewhere, I explore the flip side of the heroic tradition associated with such colossi, one which casts giants in the domain of the grotesque, the evil, and the ridiculous. The “Biancone” presented in Lippi’s work is a bumbling and malicious anti-hero and, as annotations to the text by Paolo Minucci in 1688 indicate, the title reflects a moniker coined by a broader public, perhaps giving insight into popular oral culture often lost in the historical record.<sup>4</sup>

Such traditions often paired giants with dwarfs, juxtaposing the extraordinarily large with the extraordinarily small, both seen in some ways as inhabiting the realm of the “monstrous.” This study uses as its springboard a well-known satirical letter of 1588 in the State Archives of Florence brought to light by Malcolm Campbell and Gino Corti, which links Ammannati’s giant, dubbed “Il Mascherone” with Valerio Cioli’s statue of the court dwarf Morgante then set up as a fountain in the Boboli gardens

Francesco Settimanni, and letters by artists like Vincenzo de’ Rossi. See Lapini, *Diario fiorentino*, 128; Wiles, *Fountains of Florentine Sculptors*, 119; Utz, “Ammannati’s Fountain of Juno,” 395; Utz, “Ammannati’s Apennine,” 300; and Utz, “*Labors of Hercules*,” 362.

2 Else, “Water and Stone,” 22–26. On the genre of the colossus in the sixteenth century, see the foundational study by Bush, *Colossal Sculpture*, and for sculpting figures from a single block, Lavin, “*Ex Uno Lapide*.”

3 Lippi’s work was first published posthumously in 1676 under an anagram Perlone Zipoli; see Zipoli [Lippi], *Malmantile Racquistato*; and overview in Struhal, “La Semplice Imitazione,” 9–21.

4 The edition published in 1688 featured additional notes and glossaries of Florentine vernacular words and phrases by Paolo Minucci under the anagram Puccio Lamoni. See Zipoli [Lippi], *Malmantile Racquistato*, 1688, and overview in Struhal, “La Semplice Imitazione,” 9–21.



Figure 11.1 Bartolomeo Ammannati, *Neptune Fountain*, 1560–74. Piazza della Signoria, Florence. Photo: Felicia Else.



Figure 11.2 Piazza della Signoria and Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence, showing Ammannati's *Neptune Fountain*, Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* (replica), Michelangelo's *David* (replica), Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*, Cellini's *Perseus and Medusa*, and Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine*. Photo: Felicia Else.



Figure 11.3 View in Piazza della Signoria showing Ammannati's *Neptune Fountain*, Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* (replica), Michelangelo's *David* (replica) and Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*. Photo: Felicia Else.

of the Pitti Palace (figure 11.4).<sup>5</sup> The letter's irreverent overtones speak to popular culture even in our own time. As Detlef Heikamp observes, "The opposition between 'Mascherone/Nettuno' and Morgante on a tortoise ... ridicules Ammannati's giant and reveals the immense popularity that Cioli's figure enjoyed," adding that "certain modern postcards that show images of both Michelangelo's *David* and the Dwarf of Boboli engage in the same type of burlesque juxtaposition."<sup>6</sup> As this examination will show, there is a rich tradition and context for such pairings, and a history tracing "Biancone" would not be complete without "Morgante." From the carnivalesque to the *Wunderkammer*, giants and dwarfs came together in myriad rich, imaginative, though sometimes unsavory ways, intermingling the realms of art, literature, natural history, festivals, court life, and popular culture. What may seem a great weakness in Ammannati's colossal statue might just be

5 See Campbell and Corti, "Ammannati's Neptune Fountain," 87–93. The letter bears the date of February 1587, which if written in Florence would be 1588 (*stile commune*) because of its different calendar dating, the new year beginning March 25.

6 Heikamp, "Nani alla corte," 51.



Figure 11.4 Valerio Cioli, *Morgante on Tortoise* (replica of marble original), ca. 1564. Boboli Gardens, Florence. Photo: Felicia Else.

a mark of distinction, allowing special insight to the elusive but delightful subjects of humor and popular culture in the early modern age.

Ammannati's statue may have been doomed to infamy even before his chisel hit the colossal block. Scholars know well the fierce competition for the commission based on designs for the sculptural centerpiece. In the era of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (r. 1537–74), an intensely competitive and critical climate mixed with court politics. Zygmunt Wazbinski has used the term *cane abbaiente* or "barking dogs" to characterize the critical exchanges between artists and writers.<sup>7</sup> Vincenzo Borghini, the artistic advisor to Cosimo I, coined the phrase that Florentines have "a good eye but also a stinging and vicious tongue."<sup>8</sup> Though a contest of sorts was staged with full-sized colossal models, Giorgio Vasari and Benvenuto Cellini acknowledged that the outcome was to be based on court favoritism, with the implication

7 Wazbinski, "Artisti e pubblico," 3–24.

8 The original Italian, from a letter of 1577 by Vincenzo Borghini to Bernardo Buontalenti, reads: "un occhio buono ma anche una lingua pungente e maligna." See Bottari and Ticozzi, *Raccolta di lettere*, 1:243.

that Ammannati would win, and that the so-called competition was merely a vehicle for display. Leone Leoni described a scene of intensity, partiality and disappointment, closing with the line “Ecco detto la gigantata” (So much for the giant business).<sup>9</sup> Leoni tellingly did not use a term for “contest,” such as *gara* or *concorso*, but instead invented a variation on *gigante* to evoke, with a mixture of wit, cynicism, and sarcasm, the sight of so many giants enmeshed in a messy and pointless exercise.

Unfortunately for Ammannati, the 1588 pasquinade cited earlier was just one of many negative associations with his colossal Neptune that followed. The stone itself proved problematic, having been carved down so much by Baccio Bandinelli that the block was too narrow for Ammannati to make an effective composition. The situation was exacerbated by Cellini who wrote embittered verses against Ammannati. In 1580, the fountain was severely vandalized, and, not long after, the artist himself recanted his work due to its nudity.<sup>10</sup> However, the 1588 pasquinade deserves special attention here because of how the statue's gigantic size was co-opted for comic effect and satirical critique, in this case, the pro-Habsburg maritime policies of the Medici.<sup>11</sup> Taking the form of a letter, it addresses Ammannati's *Neptune* as “Gigante della Fonte di Piazza, alias il Mascherone,” a nickname similar to “Biancone” in the use of the augmentative suffix, *-one* in this case, attached to *maschera*, itself not a signifier of the heroic traditions of Olympian gods like Neptune, but a grotesque mask. This visual form was used to decorate fountains, but here, as Campbell and Corti further suggest, it “designates a person with an unattractive face.”<sup>12</sup> In Paul Barolsky's study of humor in the Renaissance, such leering faces were employed in various settings to add wit, levity and even irony, for example by Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel and by Agnolo Bronzino in *Portrait of a Young Man*.<sup>13</sup> One could find in Mannerist palaces and gardens gargantuan gaping mouths like the Hellmouth at the Orsini garden at Bomarzo or Alessandro Vittoria's fireplace at Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza, which John Shearman calls bizarre and fantastical “set-pieces” intended to entertain and arouse wonder.<sup>14</sup>

9 Translation of *gigantata* from Poeschke, *Michelangelo and His World*, 204. On this and the competition overall, see *ibid.*, 204, and Else, *Politics of Water*, 56–60.

10 On Cellini, the 1580 vandalism, and the artist's recanting, see discussion in Else, “Water and Stone,” 89–92, 95–100, and Else, *Politics of Water*, 61–62 and 140–43.

11 Campbell and Corti, “Ammannati's Neptune Fountain,” 92.

12 *Ibid.*, 89.

13 Barolsky, *Infinite Jest*, 59–62, 141.

14 Shearman, *Mannerism*, 112–25. On the grotesque and the gigantic in Renaissance gardens and landscapes, see Morgan, *Monster in the Garden*, 47–81 and 115–34.

Elsewhere in the 1588 pasquinade, the purported author plays on largeness by contrasting it with the small, as he proclaims to Neptune that "you are so large and I so small" and asks the colossus to give "a little of your great size" to a "man so small." One passage jeers at the cheapness of Italian mercenaries who are for hire for an upcoming naval battle, which as Campbell and Corti suggest, references the Spanish Armada, facetiously hailing the colossus as "such a lovely large person as you." The author references Neptune's context among other statuary giants in the Piazza della Signoria, directing *Mascherone* to greet his neighbors, Hercules (referencing Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*), Daniello (a possibly purposeful misidentification of Michelangelo's *David*), and Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine*. But he does not extend his greetings to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* or to Cellini's *Perseus and Medusa* as "they are not of your lineage," being both smaller and of bronze (figures 11.2–11.3 and 11.5–11.6). In closing, the writer asks the colossus if he is passing by the Pitti, the courtly palace and gardens across the Arno, to "deliver infinite salutations to Morgante," understood to be Cioli's statue of the renowned court dwarf.<sup>15</sup> As scholars have noted, Cioli's statue splays out his right hand parodying a commanding gesture used by heroic subjects, for instance in the ancient equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius and, though it differs from Ammannati's statue, in representations of Neptune as a Virgilian calmer of stormy seas, seen, for example, in the *Neptune* statue created in 1557 by the Florentine sculptor Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli in Messina.<sup>16</sup> Campbell and Corti elaborate on the rapport between dwarf and giant, seeing the Cioli sculpture as a "burlesque of statues of the sea god," used here "to mock another, grander member of the same breed in the Piazza della Signoria in order to warn his countrymen against participation in one of the greatest disasters in maritime history."<sup>17</sup> The 1588 pasquinade is signed *L'uomo selvaggio*, literally "The man of the woods," but a reference to the wild man, a category of "uncivilized" hairy beings who were also often associated with giants and dwarfs, sometimes quite literally.<sup>18</sup>

15 The original Italian reads: "voi tanto grande et io tanto piccolo," "un poco della sua grandezza," "uomo alquanto piccolo," "voi tanto personciona bella," "non sono del vostro ligniaggio," and "raccomandassi a Morgante per infinite volte." For the document's transcription, translation and interpretation used here, see Campbell and Corti, "Ammannati's Neptune Fountain," 87–92.

16 See O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies," 266–67; Holderbaum, "A Bronze by Giovanni Bologna," 439; Heikamp, "Nani alla corte," 51; Else, *Politics of Water*, 35–36; and the following note.

17 Campbell and Corti, "Ammannati's Neptune Fountain," 93.

18 Bernheimer points out that the wild man may assume the guise both of dwarfs and of giants; *Wild Men*, 45.





Figure 11.5 View of Piazza della Signoria showing Ammannati's *Neptune Fountain*, Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* (replica), Michelangelo's *David* (replica), Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*, and Cellini's *Perseus and Medusa*. Photo: Felicia Else.



Figure 11.6 View from behind Cellini's *Perseus and Medusa* in the Loggia dei Lanzi showing Michelangelo's *David* (replica) and Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*. Photo: Felicia Else.

As the author of the 1588 pasquinade shows, there was no end to the creative and clever strategies used to critique Ammannati's statue by upending or altering the traditional heroic associations of such *giganti*. John Paoletti reconsiders Michelangelo's *David* in relation to more popular forms of giants in the realms of festivals and folklore, such as large-scale puppets, walkers on stilts, firework displays, and ephemeral statues carried in parades.<sup>19</sup> Depending on the context, giants could be civic guardian figures, like town "giants," or distinguished forbears, as Annius of Viterbo had argued in 1498 was the case with Noah and his descendants who had traveled to Italy and founded the Tuscan people, and by extension the Florentines. In fact, this version of the foundation of Tuscany was expanded in the mid-sixteenth century by Giambattista Gelli and Pierfancesco Giambullari, members of the Accademia Fiorentina, becoming a source of contention between its two main rival factions, the Aramei and the Umidi, about which more will be said further in this chapter.<sup>20</sup> Ephemeral decorations for the entry of Philip II of Spain into London in 1554 portrayed gigantic effigies of Gogmagog and Corineus as welcoming civic guardian figures, a feature that influenced Borghini's design for the Entry of Joanna of Austria into Florence in 1565.<sup>21</sup> As Walter Stephens and others have outlined, giants were just as often associated with malevolence, "a menacing cultural Other, a ... creature who must be killed or driven away before cultivation and civilization can begin."<sup>22</sup> Classical texts provided a rich store of badly behaving behemoths, like the man-eating Polyphemus or Giulio Romano's giants in the Palazzo del Te, shown with exaggerated, caricatured facial features whose defeat by the Olympians symbolized reason and order triumphing over evil and chaos.<sup>23</sup> Giants were included among the monstrous and bizarre imagined "races" of the world, as seen on the Hereford World Map (ca. 1300) which shows the dog-headed cynocephali labeled as *gigantes*.<sup>24</sup> Giants thus could be enemy destroyers or benign protectors, and Paoletti embraces the paradoxical

19 Paoletti, *Michelangelo's David*, 165–72.

20 This rivalry, as discussed later in this chapter, informs much of the artistic and literary portrayals of giants and dwarfs, such as Bronzino's painting of *Morgante* (ca. 1547–53) and Girolamo Amelonghi's *La Gigantea* (1566); see O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 87–94, and Zanrè, *Cultural Non-Conformity*, 104.

21 As Scorza puts it, Borghini "translated monsters of British folklore into proper classical personifications," reimagining them as Austria and Tuscany; "Vincenzo Borgini and *Invenzione*," 58–60.

22 Stephens, *Giants*, 37–40 and 101–11, and Paoletti, *Michelangelo's David*, 165–72.

23 Stephens, *Giants*, 64–66; Felton, "Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous," 108–19; and Hall, *After Raphael*, 97–98.

24 Steel, "Centaur, Satyr," 259–73.



quality of such categories: "As is so often the case in Renaissance iconography, an image can function within the culture bearing diametrically opposed meanings."<sup>25</sup>

In their sharp critiques of large statues like Ammannati's, Florentine audiences delighted in moving between such poles. Michelangelo himself wrote a jocular response to the Medici's request for a colossus to be erected near San Lorenzo, suggesting that it should be placed "on the other corner, where the barber's shop is ... the figure could be sitting down, and ... the seat could be made ... hollow inside [so] ... the barber's shop could go underneath and so the rent would not be lost."<sup>26</sup> By shifting the tone to the barber shop, Michelangelo moves to the world of the mundane and even suggests a sense of cheapness in wanting to preserve the income from a barber shop. Furthermore, his suggestion of placing the shop underneath the seated figure means the barbers would be working directly under the giant's *culo* (ass). Michelangelo's next suggestion takes us firmly into the realm of the grotesque and oversized, recommending that the statue be made large enough to serve as the bell tower for the church so that when the sound of the bells emits from the figure's mouth, it would give the impression that the "colossus would seem to be crying mercy."<sup>27</sup> This "howling" image suggests the comical exaggerated features of grotesque masks, like that of the 1588 pasquinade's *Mascherone* or at Bomarzo.

When it comes to mockery of statues and large size, Bandinelli's work is a treasure trove which draws on the traditions of the pasquinade and the carnivalesque to critique such "giants." Antonfrancesco Grazzini, called Il Lasca, evoked the pairing of giants and dwarfs when he wrote of Bandinelli's sculptures for the Florentine Cathedral: "it is strange in such a worthy Church to see the giant Christ and the dwarfish choir" (*Cristo Gigante e 'l coro nano*).<sup>28</sup> He calls the whole troop of statues at the main altar, of God the Father, the Son, and Adam and Eve, "four big rascals (*quattro birboni*)," applying the plural of the same alterative suffix, *-one* as *Mascherone* and "Biancone," similarly using the language of large size to enhance derision.<sup>29</sup> In a satirical poem analyzed by Louis Waldman, Hercules speaks indignantly to his unworthy Florentine audience, calling them "commoners" using a pejorative of *plebeo*. The statue marvels sarcastically

25 Paoletti, *Michelangelo's David*, 170.

26 Excerpts and translation from Barolsky, who further cites the papal functionary's response—"his Holiness would have you to understand it is the truth and not a joke"; *Infinite Jest*, 68–69.

27 Ibid., 69.

28 Heikamp, "Poesie in vituperio," 62–67, and Barkan, *Unearthing the Past*, 284–86.

29 Barkan, *Unearthing the Past*, 284.

at how artistic judgments are being made by sausage vendors and green grocers. The humorous juxtaposition of the traditionally heroic pagan subject of Hercules with lowlier social classes is not unlike Michelangelo's jest of the San Lorenzo colossus. The mixing of high and low characterizes such expressions, and, as Waldman astutely observes, meanings and identities could be manipulated in clever and indirect ways: "Like many of the pasquinades, the sonnets on the *Hercules* are clearly the productions of a literate elite, which artfully pretend to advance the views of a *popolano* [populist] constituency."<sup>30</sup> Such artfulness also informed poetic verses that followed Cellini's more successful unveiling of his *Perseus and Medusa* in the same piazza. This yielded especially rich results because of Medusa's ability to turn figures to stone, which, as exemplified in a sonnet by literato Benedetto Varchi, extended to Cellini's artistic ability through his bronze *Perseus* to turn to stone both viewers and the other statues in the piazza, which are themselves of marble. A sixteenth-century sonnet by Paolo Mini pits the marble colossi on the piazza against the bronze *Perseus* and Donatello's *Judith*, with Bandinelli's *Hercules* coming across as stupid and the *David* as disdainful. Shearman noted that this and other poems employed tortuous metaphors in which the identities of the author, statue, and mythological subject intermingle, and showed how they can also be tied to a larger tradition of a "Medusa effect" and "stony images" hailing back to lofty sources in antiquity as well as to Dante and Petrarch.<sup>31</sup>

Just as giants could be cast in a jocular and critical light, so too could dwarfs, as both were seen to inhabit the realm of the "monstrous." Dwarfs had long been a part of court society as a marker of social status for princely rulers, but, as Robin O'Bryan has pointed out, the time of Cosimo I also marked a shift towards a more pejorative portrayal of dwarfs. Cioli's statue of Morgante on the tortoise (figure 11.4) shows "his rotund form exposed ignominiously from all angles," his splayed hands and open mouth mimicking features of the animal below, suggesting a kinship between dwarf and beast.<sup>32</sup> The double-sided portrait by Bronzino similarly shows the dwarf's unidealized nude body among creatures of the natural world, described by Vasari as having "the bizarre and monstrous members

30 Waldman, "Miracol' novo et raro," 419–25.

31 Shearman, *Only Connect*, 44–58 with the discussion of the Mini sonnet on 57.

32 O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies," 263–69; "Tortoise, A Fish," 138–40; and "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 86–87. On the "monstrous" and grotesque aspects of dwarfs like Morgante and their role in reinforcing the virtues of rulers like Cosimo, also see Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 53–98, and "Lords and Monsters."

which that dwarf has ... [a picture that] is beautiful and marvelous.”<sup>33</sup> As O’Bryan has examined in depth, Bronzino was also a poet familiar with the tradition of the burlesque, who was caught up in the conflicts of the Accademia Fiorentina, including heated disagreements over issues such as the origins of the Tuscan language and the administration and regulation of members and activities. Of the two rival factions, the Aramei promoted more restrictive reforms; they were named after the belief that Tuscany was founded by Noah and the Tuscan language derived from Aramaic. The Umidi, whose members were part of the original literary organization (referred to as the Accademia degli Umidi), challenged the Aramei’s foundation myths as well as their intellectual pedantry. Bronzino’s painting is loaded with sexual innuendo and back-handed critiques of the Aramei, whose drastic reforms, intended to promote Cosimo’s strict agenda, resulted in the expulsion of many founding members of the Umidi, including the artist himself.<sup>34</sup>

In this charged literary and artistic environment, giants were paired with dwarfs, juxtaposing both spectrums of “monstrous” size for further expressive power or comic effect. Such associations were not entirely uncommon. Collectors interested in the marvels of nature could find discussions of giants and dwarfs close together in Ulisse Aldrovandi’s *Monstrorum historia* (1642), an encyclopedic compendium of so called “monsters” by one of the most renowned naturalists and collectors of Italy.<sup>35</sup> They formed living parts of princely collections, as pictured in a sixteenth-century painting at Schloss Ambras showing the court dwarf Thome[r]le and a giant previously thought to be Giovanni Bona but reidentified as Anton Fran[c]k (figure 11.7).<sup>36</sup> Anton Francesco Doni’s *I Marmi* (1552) juxtaposes absurd extremes of large and small, describing giants who eat quantities so large that a grain of wheat is comparable to the city of Florence and pygmies so small that three hundred can fit on a nutshell.<sup>37</sup> A sixteenth-century poem possibly by Grazzini about Pietro Barbino, another dwarf in Cosimo’s service, proclaims that “today the dwarfs have the valor of giants” and compares Barbino to Hercules, drawing perhaps on an ancient story in which a host of dwarfs or pygmies attack the legendary strongman, a subject painted by Dosso Dossi, which highlights the

33 O’Bryan, “Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf,” 80.

34 Ibid., 87–94.

35 Aldrovandi, *Monstrorum historia*, 34–40.

36 See discussion by Rabanser in chapter 5 of this volume.

37 Doni, *I Marmi*, 141, 143. The reference to fitting items on a nutshell could also draw from objects of wonders in collection cabinets, such as a sixteenth-century cherry pit carved with over sixty heads, now in the Museo degli Argenti of the Pitti Palace.



Figure 11.7 Anonymous, *Portrait of Giant Anton Franck and Dwarf Thome[r]le*, late sixteenth century. Oil on canvas, 265 × 160 cm (104.3 × 63 in.). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, picture gallery, inv. 8299 © KHM-Museumsverband.

great discrepancies in scale.<sup>38</sup> The very name “Morgante” for a dwarf pokes fun at such ironic juxtapositions, as it is the name of a giant featured in Luigi Pulci’s fifteenth-century literary epic of the same name, one who carried the clapper of a bell as a weapon. Referencing Pulci also linked the age of Cosimo I with that of a revered predecessor, Lorenzo the Magnificent, in whose circle the poet had been associated.<sup>39</sup> Poets employed the burlesque tradition of antiphrasis to convey this and other contradictory aspects of Morgante, like these verses by Grazzini: “A dwarf that had the name of a giant / ... That had the nature, color and likeness / Of man, animal, fish and bird / ... so ugly that he seemed handsome/ ... The most wise and prudent; / The most rare and sovereign / Buffoon that ever saw either sun or stars” and “one organ to the other so contrary / So repulsive and extravagant / That seen from head to toe / He appeared foreshortened by those able to see him, / Being a gracious and beautiful monster.”<sup>40</sup> Even after the deaths of Morgante and Cosimo I, the dwarf continued to be featured in works of art, like a bronze by Giambologna for Francesco I that served as a fountain for the hanging garden on the roof of the Loggia dei Lanzi, his hands holding a fish and fishing rod and his nude body unusually twisted to showcase his unidealized form, all set atop a fantastical marine dragon (figure 11.8).<sup>41</sup>

In other literary compositions protesting the Aramei in the wake of the 1547 reforms of the Accademia Fiorentina, giants and dwarfs were sent into battle. Various scholars have examined how these satirical compositions referenced specific writers and mocked the pedantry of the Aramei. The Aramei were usually cast as dwarfs or pygmies to reflect the small size of their intellect, and the Umidi associated with the giants as they considered themselves to be the original founders of the Accademia (perhaps drawing

38 The original Italian reads: “il valor di Gigante hanno hoggi i Nani.” For the poem, see Crimi and Spila, *Nanerie*, 71–75, and Heikamp, “Nani alla corte,” 54. For the painting by Dosso Dossi, see Humfrey, “Hercules and the Pygmies.”

39 Cioli statue’s placement on a tortoise recalls an episode in Pulci’s epic in which the giant Morgante kills and eats a tortoise. See Heikamp, “Il Nano Morgante Tentativo,” 286; O’Bryan, “Tortoise, A Fish,” 135–39; and O’Bryan, “Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf,” 93–94. On other dwarfs who were named “Morgante,” see Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 63, 70–71, and Hendler, *Gracious and Beautiful Monster*, 34.

40 Translation of Grazzini’s verses from Hendler, *Gracious and Beautiful Monster*, 32–33. On antiphrasis, see also Crimi and Spila, *Nanerie*, 113–17.

41 Giambologna’s bronze in the Bargello Museum has also been reconstructed to show the dwarf seated on a snail shell from the ducal collection. See Heikamp, “Nani alla corte,” 59–61, “Il Nano Morgante nel giardino,” and O’Bryan, “Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf,” 267–68. The original documents called for Morgante to be accompanied by a snail; Holderbaum, “A Bronze by Giovanni Bologna,” 440.



Figure 11.8 Giambologna, *Morgante on a Sea Monster* (replica of original, ca. 1583). Bronze, rooftop deck of Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence. Photo: Felicia Else.

facetiously on the legend promoted by Aramei members, following Annius of Viterbo, that regarded Noah and giants as the founders of Tuscany), though some references remain ambiguous and fail to distinguish cleanly between the two camps, as some members were critiqued for betraying their roots.<sup>42</sup> Just as giants could convey paradoxical meanings, so too were dwarfs cast as both intelligent and ignorant, this duality of meaning a characteristic feature of burlesque poetry. Varchi's *Canzona de' mostri innamorati* (Song of Monsters in Love), composed for a Carnival *mascherata* in 1547, features among its "monsters" love-sick giants and dwarfs competing for the women of Florence, with the latter having greater success due to their *ingegno* (wit or phallus).<sup>43</sup> In a similar battle composed by Grazzini, in an octave titled *La scusazione dei nani*, the dwarfs must use their "industriousness and knowledge" to overcome the giants' "bodily strength."<sup>44</sup>

42 O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 90–91; Hendler, *Gracious and Beautiful Monster*, 34; Zanrè, *Cultural Non-Conformity*, 100–6; and Werner, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 119–24, 127–44.

43 O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 101 n. 74; Crimi and Spila, *Nanerie*, 147–48; and Werner, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 144–45.

44 The original Italian reads: "industria e sapere" and "forza di corpo"; see Crimi and Spila, *Nanerie*, 148–49, and Werner, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 147–48.

Battling giants, dwarfs, and monsters took center stage in a trio of mock epics that took things to a whole new level of grotesquerie. Girolamo Amelonghi's *La Gigantea* (written in 1547, first published in 1566) chronicles the battle between the Gods and the Giants but turns the ancient myth on its head by having the Giants prevail. As Domenico Zanrè examines in detail, this and other mock-heroic works reflect characteristics of the carnivalesque as outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his landmark study of Rabelais. This aesthetic "celebrates the anarchic, body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture, and seeks to mobilise them against the humourless seriousness of official culture."<sup>45</sup> Zanrè rightly cautions against viewing popular and official cultures as always separate and distinct, an intermingling suggested earlier by Waldman in relation to the pasquinade. Amelonghi may have "borrowed from the popularizing tradition," but he himself was highly educated and held important social positions even while his condition as a hunchback, a figure associated with the carnivalesque, left him open to social stigma.<sup>46</sup> Like Rabelais's Pantagruel and Gargantua, Amelonghi's giants partake of the extremes of bodily functions like defecation described in fantastic and excessive terms. Amelonghi relates of one giant in France excreting with gusto, and he has Jove "shitting" his underpants out of fear.<sup>47</sup> Excessive, too, are the giants' sizes and appetites. Furore, leader of the giants, has cheeks that measure one hundred *braccia* (about 192 feet) and a "big ugly body" (*corpaccio*) a mile wide, and has a thirst so great that he drinks the Rivers Po and Danube, the Aegean and Red Seas and the entire Ocean. Appropriately, this mock hero goes on to put out a fire by dropping his pants, pissing "the equivalent of two rivers and two seas" and driving the smoke away "with that which comes out of his behind."<sup>48</sup> Amelonghi uses local landmarks to connect the work to his own time and place, as for instance when the giant Dragutte carries the campanile of Pisa into battle and Lestrigon wears "the Duomo of Florence as a lightweight cap."<sup>49</sup> Borghini similarly evoked massive size by referencing the dome of the cathedral of Florence when, exasperated by Cellini and Ammannati, he wrote of "the vanity and arrogance that swells certain heads; if the cupola were a cap it

45 Quoted from Zanrè, *Cultural Non-Conformity*, 87.

46 Ibid., 87–89.

47 Ibid., 97–98. The exact phrase is "Giove sentendo allor quel che si trama Empie per la paura le mutande."

48 "E due fiumi e due mar v pisciò dentro"; translations and excerpts of Amelonghi from ibid., 99–101.

49 Ibid., 101–2.

would be too small for them."<sup>50</sup> Amelonghi also mocks the Aramei in the names of some of his unruly giants, such as Lestrigon, which were taken from a list of the so-called kings of Tuscany featured in Gelli's and Giambullari's accounts of the founding of Florence by Noah.<sup>51</sup>

Dwarfs received their own mock-heroic treatment in Michelangelo Serafini's *La Nanea*, also composed in 1547 as a sequel to Amelonghi's *Gigantea*, and both would be published together in 1566. In this similarly irreverent composition dubbed an exemplar of the *comico-grottesco*, dwarfs and pygmies battle the Giants and rescue the Olympian gods. However, as Giuseppe Crimi and Cristiano Spila discuss, although Serafini's pygmies, representing the Aramei, may have conquered the Giants, they remain inferior and unworthy of their victory on Olympus.<sup>52</sup> Grazzini's *La guerra de' mostri* (The War of the Monsters) completes the triad of mock-heroic works composed in 1547 in response to the tensions and conflicts of the Accademia Fiorentina, and all three works would eventually be published together in 1612.<sup>53</sup> In this strange account, a new race of monsters takes control of the heavens and, as Inge Werner puts it, "party all day, abuse their power and leave earth in scarcity and chaos."<sup>54</sup> These monsters are even more grotesque than their giant and dwarfish predecessors: "Many have the head and foot of Giants, the rest diminutive, like Dwarfs: Some have two heads, six feet and three arms, some have the face of an owl, some an ox."<sup>55</sup> In this literary and social context, giants and dwarfs occupied the strange and wondrous realm of the monstrous, which, like the arts, was informed by bitter rivalries, satirical bite, and carnivalesque irreverence.

These traditions would seem ripe ground for a nickname like "Biancone," but although most presume the epithet dates from Ammannati's time, it does not show up in any printed form until the following century.<sup>56</sup> Its

50 Translation from Wittkower, *Divine Michelangelo*, 20.

51 Zanrè, *Cultural Non-Conformity*, 104.

52 They were published under the title *La Gigantea insieme con La Nanea nuovamente mandata in luce*; see Crimi and Spila, *Nanerie*, 139–40, 152–56; Werner, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 125–26; and Amelonghi, *La Gigantea e La Nanea*.

53 O'Bryan, "Portrait of a Renaissance Dwarf," 91; and Werner, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 127–28.

54 Werner, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 156.

55 The original Italian reads: "Molti han la testa, e' piè come Giganti, / Nel resto poi sono sparuti, e Nani: / Chi ha duo capi, sei piedi, e tre braccia, / Chi d'assiuolo, e chi di bue la faccia"; Amelonghi, *La Gigantea e La Nanea*, 128.

56 The word *biancone* was in fact used in the sixteenth century, being the name of a geographic location and of the Friulian poet Girolamo Biancone, and was also used in Pietro Aretino's



first printed appearance seems to be in Lippi's *Il Malmantile Racquistato*, which he may have begun in 1643–44 during a trip to Innsbruck as a way to entertain Archduchess Claudia de' Medici, who was at court there, but which he developed more fully upon his return to Florence, where the work was read publicly in 1649.<sup>57</sup> The poem was first published after the author's death in 1676 under an anagram of his name, "Perlone Zipoli," and re-published in 1688 with a dedication to Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici (1617–1675) along with extensive notes by fellow literato Paolo Minucci under the anagram "Puccio Lamoni."<sup>58</sup>

*Malmantile* shares much with sixteenth-century predecessors such as Amelonghi's *La Gigantea*. Lippi's poem also mocks heroic traditions and speaks the language of the burlesque. It recounts the tale of a quest by Queen Celidora and her troops led by Baldone to retake her castle called Malmantile from Bertinella, who has usurped it, a parody of Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* where Jerusalem is "liberated" by European Christians. Here, too, are plentiful elements of the carnivalesque, as well as the mixing of fictional plots with references to actual historical places and people. One example involves Paride Garani and the origin of the name Montelupo, a Tuscan town near Florence. After leaving battle due to a bad case of diarrhea, Garani gets so drunk that he loses his way and encounters three fairies who ask him to free Tura, who had been transformed into a wolf circling a castle by the witch Martinazza. In canto XII, after Paride is successful, he asks the local population to name their castle Montelupo (aptly translated as "Mount Wolf"), and, to set things straight, Minucci's commentary dismisses Lippi's account as fictitious.<sup>59</sup> Where Lippi's *Malmantile* really stands out is in its use of the Florentine vernacular, an aspect made unusually explicit by Minucci's copious notes, which far exceed Lippi's actual poem and include extensive glossaries explaining words, phrases, and proverbs as well as specific places or persons, as in the case of Montelupo. Like his predecessors

raunchy *Ragionamenti* to describe a muleteer. Its application to Ammannati's statue, however, does not appear in any written material from the sixteenth century so far known to me from the scholarly work on the fountain and sculptor.

57 Struhal, "La Semplice Imitazione," 17–20, and "Heroes and Anti-Heroes," 47. My thanks to Victor Coonin for sharing a search technique that first allowed me to uncover the nickname's appearance in this source.

58 According to Struhal, many of the copies of the 1676 edition were destroyed because the editor Giovanni Cinelli added a sarcastic mock poem intended to "take revenge" on his Florentine enemies, which had included Paolo Minucci; *ibid.*, 20–21. Also see Zipoli [Lippi], *Il Malmantile*; and Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*.

59 Struhal, "La Semplice Imitazione," 72–73; Struhal, "Reading with *Acutezza*," 105–6; and Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 523–24 (canto XII, stanzas 6–7).

in the sixteenth century, Lippi presents a complex admixture of the academic and the everyday to convey humor, intellectual craft, and expressiveness. As Eva Struhal and other literary scholars discuss, Lippi's *Malmantile* was strongly influenced by the Accademia degli Apatisti, one of the leading literary academies in Florence, established in 1638 and dedicated to local language, history, literature, and science, which brought together aristocratic and bourgeois social classes. Lippi read his poem at the Accademia's meetings, and its members, of which Lippi himself was one, were referenced in it via anagrammatic names. This academic culture regarded proverbs and everyday oral language with great interest, with *Malmantile* reflecting a "quasi-scholarly interest in creating a collection of Florentine idioms and figures of speech," presented in a format that was "highly salacious and entertaining."<sup>60</sup> Carmelo Previtera emphasizes the poem's burlesque nature, as it was written as a diversion for laughter and used a "Tuscanized language, full of idiocies, slang, oddities, thieves' jargon, dense dialects, with many popular proverbs and allusive phrases."<sup>61</sup> Other influential traditions that drew on popular culture include the *cicalate accademiche*, named after the *cicada* or cricket, whose chatter is jokingly invoked as a muse, and the *frottola*, a loose, often nonsensical composition strung together from vernacular proverbs and sayings. Of special importance may have been Giambattista Basile's *Cunto de li cunti* (Tale of Tales), one of the first collections of fairy tales in Italy. While it describes itself as entertainment for young children, it was the product of an adult courtly audience in Naples which employed elements of popular culture and the carnivalesque. Fellow Apatisti member and Neapolitan artist Salvator Rosa brought Basile's work, which was written in the local Neapolitan dialect, to Lippi's attention.<sup>62</sup> Lippi was a Seicento artist and his use of the Florentine vernacular has been compared to the naturalism he applied in his paintings, with both his writings and his paintings placing great value on the investigation of everyday life.<sup>63</sup>

60 Lippi was one of its earliest members. See Struhal, "La Semplice Imitazione," 10–11 and 103–27; Struhal, "Reading with *Acutezza*," 117–18; and Struhal, "Heroes and Anti-Heroes," 39–40 and 47.

61 The original Italian reads: "lingua toscaneggiante, piena d'idiotismi, di gergo, di bizzarrie, di motti furbeschi, di riboboli dialetti, con molti proverbi popolareschi e frasi allusive" from Previtari, *La poesia giocosa*, 58–59. Previtari cites Luigi Pulci and Amelonghi's *Gigantea* as predecessors.

62 Cabani, "Testi e commento," 202–5, and Struhal, "La Semplice Imitazione," 19–20, 93–102. On Giambattista Basile's *Cunto de li cunti*, see Magnanini, "Literary Fairy Tale," 25–26, and Canepa, "Entertainment for Little Ones?," 37–54.

63 Struhal, "La Semplice Imitazione," 3–8.

*Malmantile* also features giants and dwarfs, mixing elements of the real and imagined. In canto III, a dwarf is jokingly referenced as a giant, “Batistone ... Gran gigante da Cigoli,” who, as Minucci’s subsequent notes explain, was “a Dwarf elevated from guarding sheep to serving the Most Serene Prince Matthias of Tuscany,” perhaps Mattias de’ Medici (1613–1667), son of Grand Duke Cosimo II.<sup>64</sup> Lippi describes “Pigmies distorted, and ugly, / Foot soldiers born in lower Germany / ... each having more vices than six Marguttes.”<sup>65</sup> Minucci’s notes shed much needed light on this passage, defining the “Pygmies” as a race of dwarfs living in “the Indies” mentioned by Pliny and other ancient authors, and explaining that the reference to lower Germany means that they are of low stature. “Margutte,” he proposes, may reference the nefarious half-giant Margutte in Pulci’s *Morgante*.

“Biancone” makes his appearance in the final two cantos, sent by the god Pluto to help the witch Martinazza fight Baldone’s troops. In stanza 9 of canto XI, “that most famous Biancone” (*quel famosissimo Biancone*) will come with “the clapper that belonged to Morgante” (*battaglio, ch’era di Morgante*).<sup>66</sup> This references Pulci’s epic poem, in this case the title character who carried such a weapon, but I would also point to the pairing of Neptune and Cioli’s statue of the dwarf Morgante in the 1588 pasquinade discussed earlier. Minucci’s glossary on “Biancone” confirms that this term is a reference to Ammannati’s statue and that it was used by a general public:

BIANCONE: It is the colossus of white marble made by Ammannati, placed in Florence in the Grand Ducal Piazza, in a large basin which receives water from different sources, which flow from said colossus and its annexes; it represents Neptune well and is called by everyone *the Biancone of the Piazza* [italics added by Minucci].<sup>67</sup>

64 The original Italian reads: “un Nano levato da guardare le pecore, e condotto a servire il Serenissimo Principe Mattias di Toscana”; from Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 175–76 (canto III, stanza 65). The reference to sheep herding could be a play on David.

65 The original Italian reads: “Pigmei distorti e brutti, / Fanti che nacquer nelle magne basse, / ...ha più vizzi ognun, di sei Margutti”; translated from Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 175 (canto III, stanza 66) and 177.

66 The original Italian reads: “quel famosissimo Biancone” and “battaglio, ch’era di Morgante”; from Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 495 (canto XI, stanza 9) and 496. Being sent by Pluto, god of the Underworld, could be an inversion of being sent by the more heavenly king of the gods, Jupiter.

67 The original Italian reads: “BIANCONE: E’ quel colosso di marmo bianco, fattura dell’Ammannato, il quale è posto in Firenze nella Piazza del Gran Duca, dentro a una vasca grande, la quale riceve l’acqua di diverse fontane, che scaturiscono da detto colosso e suoi

Minucci's description praises the actual artwork, an important Medici commission and public showpiece, though Lippi's character of "Biancone" is decidedly anti-heroic. As Lucia Di Santo has shown, the name "Biancone" is unknown in any other poetic works and reflects a word used by Lippi's *concittadini*, or fellow citizens, part of the author's incorporation of the "heritage of Florentine urban culture."<sup>68</sup> Lippi makes allusions to both high and low cultures as he relates the fight between "Gigante Biancone" and the Florentine troops. Stymied by the small space of the hall where the battle takes place, Biancone throws a rotting beam and a chandelier, unintentionally killing his opponents, which, as Struhal demonstrates, parodies a scene in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* where Orlando throws a giant table in a fight against thieves in a cave, a subject painted by Lippi.<sup>69</sup> As the main battle ensues, the invading Florentine troops are likened to a flock of poultry, and the brute manner in which Biancone smashes their heads together is compared to a servant breaking eggs for a frittata.<sup>70</sup>

The defeat of Biancone takes the reader further into the world of contemporary Florence and the popular culture of its streets and piazzas. The giant becomes incapacitated by a cloak thrown over his face by "Paolino Cieco (the Blind)" wearing stilts, a character Minucci dutifully identifies as "a blind composer of villanelles and other folk songs which one can still hear sung throughout Florence by other Blind Men, and boys," the kind of singing one hears throughout the piazzas "where people gather to have their dogs do various tricks."<sup>71</sup> The evocation of these more lowbrow forms of entertainment recalls the more populist side of giants in folklore and festivals. Lippi's allusion to the customs and types of Florence could also be exemplified in the figure of Paolino, who has been identified as a real person named Paolino Margherini, who is represented with St. Antoninus in a painted lunette by Sigismondo Coccapani in the courtyard of San Marco.<sup>72</sup>

annessi; e se bene rapprenta Nettuno, è chiamato da tutti *il Biancone di Piazza*"; Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 496.

68 The original Italian reads: "patrimonio di cultura urbana fiorentina"; from Di Santo, *L'eroicomico*, 110.

69 Struhal, "Reading with *Acutezza*," 112-17, and 122-23.

70 Ibid., 122-23, and Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 498-99 (canto XI, stanzas 15-19).

71 The original Italian reads: "un Cieco compositore di Villanelle, ed altre Canzonette, le quali si sentono ancora cantar per Firenze da altri Ciechi, e da i ragazzi" and "dove per adunare il popolo faceva fare diversi giuochi ad alcuni suoi cani"; Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 502.

72 Cabani discusses the figure in the painted lunette and the identification of the figure as Paolino Margherini by Antonmaria Biscioni, an eighteenth-century commentator of *Malmantile*;

Punishment for the malevolent white giant is a multi-faceted affair that is as humiliating as it is clever. In the final canto, “poor unhappy Biancone” is sentenced to serve as a galley slave, an ironic twist to Neptune’s traditional—or heroic—role as ruler over the seas and symbol of maritime prowess.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Biancone is paraded around the city like a criminal where trash, like melon rinds and cabbage stems, is thrown at him, which, as Minucci explains, is the custom of Florentine youths.<sup>74</sup> This degrading spectacle takes on even richer associations when we consider that the actual Neptune Fountain during this time had been subject to misuse as a place where animals came to drink and people did their laundry and deposited trash. It had become so bad that a barrier was set up around it and a proclamation was issued in 1649, forbidding any kind of mess near the fountain, including the washing of clothes or throwing of pieces of wood or any other filth into it.<sup>75</sup> Incidentally, such a scene could also recall a public spectacle in 1573 during Carnival, when none other than the dwarf Morgante, who had been jailed for adultery, was similarly paraded around on the back of a donkey facing its hindquarters.<sup>76</sup>

Events take an even more curious turn when Paolino, described as an “expert in hanging out with charlatans” wants to take Biancone, set atop his chariot, in the Piazza della Signoria and, placing the Giant behind curtains, make a lot of money (*gran denari*) charging members of the public to see him, “that Giant” drawing “a greater crowd than the Elephant.”<sup>77</sup> This unexpected reference to an elephant, Minucci explains, references a time when “a live Elephant was brought to Florence for a few years, and the people out of curiosity came in great numbers to see it under the Loggia della Signoria [Loggia dei Lanzi] ... where it was placed in a wooden enclosure and one paid

“Testi e commento,” 206–7.

73 The original Italian reads: “infelice è il povero Biancone.” Perhaps intending his words to be tongue in cheek, Minucci comments that “this execution remains suspect because Malmantile has neither Seas nor galleys” (Questa esecuzione resta sospesa, perchè Malmantile non haveva, ne Mare, ne galere); Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 528 (canto XII, stanza 16).

74 Ibid., 529 (canto XII, stanza 18).

75 The 1649 proclamation was reproduced on a marble sign of 1720 that was placed next to the fountain and is still visible today. On this and the barrier set up sometime in the first half of the seventeenth century, see Pratilli, *Glossario della legislazione*, 269; Else, “Water and Stone,” 268; and Schmidt, “Ammannati Restituito,” 287–93.

76 My thanks to Robin O’Byrne for this reference; and see Heikamp, “Nani alla corte,” 86 n. 13.

77 The original Italian reads: “ha genio a star coi Ciarlatani, Pensato ch’ei farebbe gran denari, / ... mostrarsi, quel Gigante / Più calca, che non hebbe l’Elefante”; Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 530 (canto XII, stanza 20).

a few pennies to enter and see it."<sup>78</sup> Minucci further reports that the creature, "singular among our lands," died in Florence from the cold, after which its skin and cleaned skeleton were preserved in the gallery of the grand duke. Whether such a creature actually existed in Florence remains unclear and is in fact not likely. Elephants were quite rare, prized as diplomatic gifts and viewed as marvels of nature.<sup>79</sup> While exotic animals such as lions, cheetahs, monkeys, ostriches, and even a giraffe and hippopotamus were acquired and housed in menageries by members of the Medici family, from Lorenzo the Magnificent to Grand Duke Cosimo III, there were no elephants; the closest case would have been the elephant Hanno presented to Pope Leo X in 1514, but which remained in Rome.<sup>80</sup> Instead, the Medici had their artists and engineers create elaborate artificial elephants for festivals like the 1579 *Sbarra* (Tournament) for Francesco I's marriage to Bianca Cappello and a *Guerra d'Amore* (War of Love) procession for the 1616 carnival celebrations under Cosimo II.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Lippi's reference seems not to reflect the elite status of such animals but has a more populist aspect, not unlike Michelangelo's joking reference to charging rent for a barbershop under a colossus discussed earlier. That said, the practice was not unknown, as a 1583 *avviso* from Madrid references a rhinoceros and an elephant which King Philip II had given to the hospitals "because they can gain profit from them by charging anyone who wishes to see them."<sup>82</sup> Certainly, elephant skin and bones would have become part of princely collections after the creature's death. The skin of the Lisbon elephant was preserved and stuffed,

78 The original Italian reads: "Fu condotto in Firenze più anni sono un' Elefante vivo, ed il popolo per la curiosità correva in gran numero a vederlo sotto le logge della Signoria ... dove stava rinchiuso in un tavolato, e si pagavano alcune crazie per entrarvi a vederlo. Questo animale singulare ne i nostri paesi, morì in Firenze per lo gran freddo, e la sua pelle ripiena, e lo scheletro nettato, e messo insieme si conservano nella Galleria del Sereniss. Gran Duca"; Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 530. The term *cratie/crazie* translated as mere coins or pennies, is the same word used in the 1588 pasquinade discussed earlier. My thanks to Michael Sherberg for his help with the translation of these passages.

79 Examples include the Lisbon elephant given to Archduke Maximilian II, a creature that formed part of a celebratory entry in 1552 along with the giant Giovanni Bona and an unidentified dwarf; see Jordan Gschwend, *Story of Süleyman*, 15 and 22–27.

80 Groom challenges a reference that Lorenzo the Magnificent had elephants, pointing out that "such high status animals ... were typically owned only by the ruling elite—sultans, emperors, kings, and popes—but not by high-ranking citizens of a republic"; *Exotic Animals*, 37–38, 47–50, and 257–61. On Hanno and Leo X, see Bedini, *Pope's Elephant*.

81 Groom, *Exotic Animals*, 146–56.

82 Translation from Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato (hereafter ASF MdP), 3255 dated July 19, 1583; <http://bia.medici.org/DocSources/src/docbase/ShareDocument.do?entryId=10761>.

and a remarkable stool was made from its bones.<sup>83</sup> Grand Duke Cosimo III had the bones and tusks of an elephant sent as a gift to Orazio Archinto in Milan in 1666.<sup>84</sup> The Loggia dei Lanzi had been used as a kind of public showcase for the remains of a *pesce grande*, thought to be a sperm whale, in 1549.<sup>85</sup> Lippi and Minucci may be drawing on all of these associations in this elaborate riff at the expense of two giants, one a marble statue, the other an elephant.

The finale for Biancone centers the action even more concretely in the environs of the Piazza della Signoria of Florence. As he weeps and curses Fortune, Biancone glimpses Perseus and the head of Medusa and “unmoving he remains from head to toe, / No more grieving, but keeping his mouth shut, / Because with his Chariot, and all mute / From the little horses transformed into marble.”<sup>86</sup> The Perseus and Medusa references Cellini’s renowned statue in the Piazza della Signoria, and scholars rightly point out that this passage reflects Lippi’s negative view of the statue and the notorious competition for it.<sup>87</sup> I would further argue that it plays directly on the poetic verses discussed earlier in the sixteenth century about these statues and their mythological subjects, like the 1588 pasquinade that pitted the marbles and bronzes of the piazza against each other and the traditions of the “Medusa effect” and “stony images” discussed by Shearman. In this case, there is a further layer of social dynamic and urban folklore, as the Olympian god Neptune takes the guise of “Biancone,” a name that has pared away any heroic mythological associations and, like many satirical expressions, turns normally praiseworthy facets, like largeness and whiteness, on their head.

Biancone may have lost that battle, but another text shows the impact that this character made on Lippi’s broader literary circle, and even demonstrates how this giant could be called into action for good. This concerns a poem by Antonio Malatesti (1610–1672), also a comic poet and one of the Apatisti members who influenced Lippi’s work. As examined by Struhal, Malatesti wrote of Lippi’s triumph over a rival, a then-fashionable poet, Orazio Persiani, author of an epic called *Armidean*. In Malatesti’s words, it is none other than “Biancone” who “escapes Malmanti” and “destroys all the Armidean giants ... Don Tarsia [a reference to Persiani] in vain asks for help in this challenge

83 Jordan Gschwend, *Story of Süleyman*, 33–34.

84 ASF Mdp 1582 dated May 11, 1666: <http://bia.medici.org/DocSources/Home.do?entryId=10761>.

85 Vossilla, “Cosimo I,” 381–83.

86 The original Italian reads: “E immoto resta lì da capo a piede, / Ne più si suol, ma tien la bocca chiusa, / Perché col Carro, e tutta la sua muta / De’ cavallacci in marmo si tramuta”; Zipoli [Lippi] and Lamoni [Minucci], *Il Malmantile*, 531 (canto XII, stanza 24).

87 Struhal, “La Semplice Imitazione,” 75, and Di Santo, *L’eroicomico*, 111.



Figure 11.9 Francesco Zuccarrelli after Lorenzo Lippi, Frontispiece for *Il Malmantile Racquistato*, 1731. Etching. Bequest of Phyllis Massar, 2011, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in public domain.

because Biancone has too great a *battaglio*" (clapper of a bell), bringing us back to the pairing with Pulci's *Morgante* and with dwarfs of that name.<sup>88</sup>

88 The original Italian reads: "Voi vedrete il Biancone / Scappar di Malmantile ... /... abatterà sul piano / tutti i Giganti dell'Armideano" and "... in vano / Don Tarsia chiederà aita in quell travaglio / Perchè Biancone ha troppo gran battaglio." The poem, now in the Biblioteca Nazionale



In this topsy-turvy world, giants and dwarfs unite to overcome an enemy, as poets like Lippi poke fun at established traditions of the heroic.

This burlesque nature of *Malmantile* is perfectly exemplified in a striking frontispiece published in editions dating from the following century, an etching by Francesco Zuccarelli of 1731, which scholars believe is based on a drawing by Lippi himself (figure 11.9).<sup>89</sup> The image seems straightforward enough, with Lippi donning a laurel crown, shown seated and writing in a book with a painter's palette at his feet and masks along a back wall, looking up for inspiration at a classicizing female figure, a traditional Muse from antiquity. But instead of a desk and traditional study, Lippi is composing his work outside on a wine barrel, and the Muse's staff has a curious brush tied to its top. Phyllis Dearborn Massar has interpreted the brush as a pennant referencing a passage in Lippi's poem when he addresses his Muse and likens his attempt at poetry to breaking a lance, with the sign hanging on the back wall perhaps indicating the setting of a tavern or villa.<sup>90</sup> However, it could also resemble the end of a broomstick, which, set against clouds, could evoke Lippi's references to witches. At the near center of the composition, positioned between artist and Muse, is a remarkable detail, a seated monkey dutifully working a pestle and mortar, which Massar suggests are grinding materials to make ink.<sup>91</sup> I would suggest an even richer array of potential humorous associations. A host of early modern imagery used monkeys and apes to make fun of artists as imitators of nature, and such pets, as James Serpell has suggested, fulfilled an "ambassadorial role because of their intermediate position on the boundary between human and animal, culture and nature."<sup>92</sup> Such a description is not unsimilar to that of giants and dwarfs, and we might even recall works like Andrea del Sarto's *Tribute to Caesar* (ca. 1520) at the Villa Medici of Poggio a Caiano, which juxtaposes a dwarf and monkey prominently in

Centrale in Florence, is not dated. See Struhal, "La Semplice Imitazione," 251–72, 365–66, and Malatesti, *Zibaldone*, 192v–193r.

89 The image itself has received little attention, and the online catalog record for the print, owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, actually gives an incorrect artist for the print: Francesco Zucchi rather than Francesco Zuccarelli. Alterocca identified the correct artist and pointed out that the composition was based on a drawing by Lippi found in a manuscript of the poem, now lost to scholars; "La vita e l'opera poetica," 159. Also see Massar, "Etching by Zuccarelli," 305–7.

90 Massar, "An Etching by Zuccarelli," 306–7.

91 Ibid.

92 Quoted in Cohen, *Ars simia naturae*, 21–19. On the imagery and tradition of monkeys and apes referencing artists as imitators of nature, see Cohen, *ibid.*, 217–18, and Janson's seminal study, *Ape and Ape Lore*.

the foreground.<sup>93</sup> The monkey in the *Malmantile* frontispiece could even be a clever reference to a figure with a mortar and pestle identified as a dwarf in Giovanni Stradano's painting of *Alchemy* (1570) in the Studiolo of Francesco I, showing just one of many possible jests against traditions, heroic and otherwise.<sup>94</sup> The world of the carnivalesque gives us monkeys as artists and giants and dwarfs as epic protagonists. The Piazza della Signoria, home to marble gods and heroes and a stage for Medici political power, becomes a place for dog tricks, side shows, blind singers on stilts, and trash-throwing youths. It is out of such colorful genres, where high and low cultures are ruthlessly mixed, that Lippi gave voice to some clever person who looked at Ammannati's massive Olympian god of the waters, and in one word, "Biancone," mocked a host of heroic ancient traditions and Medicean propagandistic programs.

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93 O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies," 262–63.

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Note: The names of individual giants and dwarfs are listed under “giants” and “dwarfs” (alphabetized by their first names or nicknames, which is how they were typically referenced). Page numbers in bold refer to images illustrated in the text.

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Not since Edward Wood's *Giants and Dwarfs* published in 1868 has the subject been the focus of a scholarly study in English. Treating the topic afresh, this volume offers new insights into the vogue for giants and dwarfs that flourished in late medieval and early modern Europe. From chapters dealing with the real dwarfs and giants in the royal and princely courts, to the imaginary giants and dwarfs that figured in the crafting of nationalistic and ancestral traditions, to giants and dwarfs used as metaphorical expression, scholars discuss their role in art, literature, and ephemeral display. Some essays examine giants and dwarfs as monsters and marvels and collectibles, while others show artists and writers emphasizing contrasts in scale to inspire awe or for comic effect. As these investigations reveal, not all court dwarfs functioned as jesters, and giant figures might equally be used to represent heroes, anti-heroes, and even a saint.

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