
HERCULES IN ITALIAN RENAISSANCE ART: MASCULINE LABOUR AND HOMOEROTIC LIBIDO

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Christian fortitude and civic heroism blend in the Renaissance figure of a muscular, idealized, nude Hercules overcoming his foes and performing mythic labours or resting in glorious victory (see plate 1).¹ By the time Cesare Ripa's iconographic guide was first published in 1593, Hercules canonically embodied *Virtù Heroica*, able to moderate anger, temper avarice and subordinate pleasure under the rule of reason.² Writers like the late fourteenth-century Chancellor of Florence Coluccio Salutati, or the early sixteenth-century Dutch priest Desiderius Erasmus held Hercules up as an exemplar of tireless effort and moral strength. Allegorically, he was regarded as the vanquisher of passion and vice, politically, as the potent foe of rebellion or tyranny.

Hercules's visual and textual representations have been naturalized as a self-evident case of classical revival and celebration of virtuous citizenry or exemplary rulership. Instead, this study takes neither classically informed political values nor the spectacle of masculinity for granted, and it considers personal as well as public resonances of the popular imagery. The Renaissance Hercules is an insistent, assertive statement of particular kinds of masculine identity, ones, furthermore, laden with the burdens of masculine ideals beyond attainment. Yvonne Tasker has observed of Hollywood action movies that 'The *body* of the male hero ... provides the space in which a tension between restraint and excess is articulated.'³ The same can be said of Hercules, for the strain of forging masculinity is worked out in very physical, laboured ways. Furthermore, the kind of masculinity on display was often sensual and sometimes conveyed homoerotic appeal.

RENAISSANCE HEROICS AND MASCULINE LABOUR

Popular perception tends to equate 'Hercules' with 'hero' and to think in terms of brawny action and ideal masculinity. Ancient heroes, however, were a rarer (though still male) breed, far from Hollywood or tabloid proclamations. The Greek word 'hero' was, as Norman Austin points out, 'an honorific title accorded by a community to a distant and legendary personage, whom the community venerated as its primordial ancestor ... Whether in cult or in the epic tradition derived



1 Detail of (plate 11) Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Labours of Hercules*, c. 1530. Red chalk. Windsor: Royal Library. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2008 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

from local cults ... [he] achieved his full heroic status only after death, when he was honored as if he were a god'.⁴ Hercules was of this category, a mortal apotheosized upon death, sired by the highest divinity, Jupiter, but of a human mother, Alcmena. True to his mixed parentage, the demigod's mythic saga represents him engaging in both flawed and ideal behaviours.⁵ Renaissance authors, artists and viewers grappled with that complexity, experimenting with the multivalent connotations of masculinity put to the test.⁶

Visualizing a republican boast as Florence formulated an expansionist programme of righteous might against supposed tyranny during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, appropriated later in the Quattrocento to populate the Medici Palace of that city when the dynasty cleverly adopted civic traditions to support their own claim to power, Hercules also featured in North Italian courts and was a popular subject for portable statuettes and multiple prints. The producers and audiences of this variable Herculean model were primarily male, although women were also increasingly exposed to domestic and public renditions of masculine strength.⁷ Tommaso Spinelli's three daughters, betrothed in the years 1458 to 1460 at the ages of seven or eleven, were instructed in the imagery of love and masculine desirability by seeing in their Florentine courtyard *sgraffito* images of naked (but genitally masked) youths, Cupid letting loose his arrow, and Hercules overcoming the Nemean Lion.⁸ Waiting between six and nine years before actually marrying, the girls came to expect vigilant, vigorous grooms.

At the large wedding of 1473 that joined Ercole d'Este of Ferrara with the daughter of the king of Naples, Eleonora of Aragon, prestigious and numerous guests gathered in Rome to enjoy sugar sculptures representing the labours of Hercules (*Ercole* in Italian) and the staged 'dance of Hercules', during which that heroic character won a mock battle against centaurs.⁹ In later years Italian troupes of acrobatic actors would entertain crowds with 'the Antiques, of carrying of men one upon an other [which] som [sic] men call Labores Herculis', feats not only named for their physical endurance but also, perhaps, for their resemblance to the manner in which Hercules defeated the marauding giant Antaeus by holding him off the ground.¹⁰ Hercules's image and his strenuous exploits – especially the struggle to the death against Antaeus – were popular with an Italian elite that could afford to commission or purchase reproductions of the masculine action figure in a variety of media, including paintings, manuscripts, statuettes, prints, tapestries and hat badges.¹¹ Varied in political allegiance, rank and location, that buying public consumed a suggestion not so much of victory but of stress, of public heroics under pressure, of a youth deciding his future conduct in the Choice at the crossroads, of an elder statesman tested to his physical and psychic limits, especially at Omphale's court and when experiencing fits of raging madness, of a classical icon animated almost beyond endurance in his numerous Labours. He had to work at his masculinity.

When standing still, resting between labours or after them all, when he can luxuriate in his victories, the demigod is muscular, confident, usually posed in a *contrapposto* stance, implying movement, an ephēbe or adult man of glorious bodily beauty and alertness (see plate 2).¹² However, he was from time to time shown as a revelling drunkard barely able to stand, his character flaws brought to the fore after the strain of recurrent rages and labours. A Bolognese bronze statuette from the 1490s has the ageing hero reclining inelegantly, clutching a vine branch and sleeping after a bout of indulgence.¹³ Inscribed on the underside with the words 'promoter of virtue' which praise the patron and antiquarian Gaspare Fantuzzi, the sculpture perhaps spurred learned companions at his convivial table to appreciate its variation from the seated precedent of antiquity, the Hercules Epitrapezios statuette that had the 'guardian spirit of the temperate board' preside over the meals of numerous ancient worthies.¹⁴ The learned wit of

the Renaissance figurine was all the keener for the ironic interplay between virtue and excess, labour and rest, strength and weakness, ideal and reality, dignity and pathos, encapsulated in the literal inversion from seated hero to splayed demigod.

In narrative or exemplary depictions Hercules was also complex, sometimes appearing as a character whose gender and sexuality were multiple ascriptions. As Erwin Panofsky uncomfortably recognized in passing, the pulpit in the Pisan Baptistery, carved by Nicolo Pisano around 1260, cast 'Hercules in the *feminine* role of Fortitude'.¹⁵ The semantics of personification and allegory meant that the abstract quality being represented, like Fortitude or Painting, was usually embodied in static, female form, thereby accentuating the distance between actuality and the higher ideal. Occasions of gender slippage in the allegorical process are often telling sites of contradiction or ambivalence, and Hercules is no exception. Seemingly a straightforward case of classicism in subject, style and significance, Hercules was a popular but complicated symbol not only for regimes or princes seeking to assert their authority but also for Renaissance humanists, artists and viewers.¹⁶

Using Hercules as his exemplar of 'robust and bold' masculinity, the sculptor and architect Filarete noted around 1464 that 'it would not be a suitable figure nor appropriate to him if he did not seem to be undergoing great struggles when he held up the sky to help Atlas or when he held Antaeus on his chest.'¹⁷ Struggle and strain are at the demigod's mythic core. Even the images of him standing imply reward after foregoing action; he is only heroic because of those earlier labours. Performing a series of labours, usually numbered twelve, and other heroic deeds, Hercules must overcome evil and thereby expiate his own wrongs, for his heroics stem from remorse and punishment after he had murdered his first spouse and children. His heroic status is shown being fought for constantly, against a series of animal and bestial opponents, chiefly the multi-headed Hydra, the Nemean lion or the Libyan monster Antaeus.¹⁸ While demonization of his enemies guaranteed resolution in favour of male power, patriarchal authority, masculine reason and human virtue, the visual imagery frequently showed him as though forever caught in the act of struggling for that closure.

Boccaccio's telling of the tale of Hercules's infatuation with Omphale/Iole in his *Famous Women* warned that Hercules's enslavement meant that men must be on constant guard against feminine wiles: 'we must be vigilant and defend our hearts with great constancy . . . Passion has to be restrained with continual effort'.¹⁹ Just such assiduous labour is what Hercules usually exercises, exemplifying the notion that masculinity continually has to come into being through crisis and challenge. Physical struggle is joined with psychic demands too, for he was a troubled character. Salutati's treatise on Hercules was partly written (from the early 1380s until his death in 1406) to answer a concern about the demigod's representation in Seneca's *Hercules furens* as a murderer of his wife and offspring.²⁰ Salutati resorted to an allegorical and etymological explanation for the complex fable, using it as a case study in Christian poetics. But the dark side of this mythic man was not eradicated. There were many Herculesees to deal with: Boccaccio catalogued thirty-one labours, and Salutati similarly analysed thirty-one labours, as well as finding in the literature forty-three strong men with the name Hercules.²¹ According to Salutati, the exemplar had provided the lesson that 'we can make the arduous ascent of the virtues, if we do not concede but fight.'²²

HERCULES AND HOMOEROTICS

According to the opening of pseudo-Lucian's *Erotes*, which treated both same-sex and cross-sex desire, Hercules was renowned for his libidinous bent.²³ Fifteenth-century humanists explicitly spoke of Hercules being smitten with another man. Panormita's self-consciously obscene *Hermaphroditus*, dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici in 1425, noted that Hercules screwed Hylas on his father's grave.²⁴ Controversy sparked by this adventurous Latin poetry disseminated the graphic picture of Hercules the sodomizer. Poliziano's poetic play *Orfeo*, first staged in Mantua in 1480, had its chief protagonist Orpheus repudiate women and praise male-only love because the gods practise it. Like his father Jupiter succumbing to Ganymede's charms, Hercules, too, was brought down by same-sex desire: 'To this sacred love did Hercules concede, / He who felled monsters [or conquered the world] till he fell to the beauty of Hylas'.²⁵ Here the Florentine scholar of Greek (whose own Greek poetry is sometimes explicitly homoerotic) recalls Theocritus's third-century BCE pastoral lament for the beautiful, golden-haired youth Hylas, lost from the sailing crew of Hercules and the Argonauts when water nymphs embraced him forever.²⁶ Hercules hunted Hylas in a frenzy, longing for the youth, and making of himself not only an impassioned lover and true friend but also, in Theocritus's view, a temporary deserter. Once more, the masculine hero is flawed, not by his desire *per se* but for the consequences, which lead him to neglect his manly duties. Hercules's reputation during the Renaissance clearly included homoerotic traces. For example, two epigrams penned by Jacopo Sannazaro in the early 1480s, but not printed for centuries thereafter, imagined jealousy on the part of Hercules's wife, or by Jupiter, in response to the hero's erotic relations with Hylas.²⁷

Such tales were in the minds of many viewers, old and young. The matters of age and change over a life cycle need to be considered in relation to eroticized power relations in the Renaissance. Older men, including teachers and masters, were same-sex lovers in a Renaissance economy of desire where 'beardless' youths with lesser power were objects of homoerotic attraction. Michael Rocke's meticulous study of official records regarding sodomy in Renaissance Florence concludes that 'men seldom had sexual relations either with very young boys or with youths past the age of twenty'; most 'passives' were *fanciulli* in Italian, *puereri* in Latin, boys 'between the ages of twelve and eighteen to twenty', though a few were much older.²⁸ If one factors into Rocke's calculations, the knowledge that during the Renaissance facial hair often did not mark the advent of early maturity until the man was aged twenty-three or so, then the ranks of *fanciulli* also included men a little older in age. If older men continued with sodomy, they usually became 'active' or dominant partners and their average age was between twenty-seven and thirty-four. The erotic pattern of age-graded marriages applied to same-sex relations between men too, for 'an average gap of eleven to nineteen years separated the senior and junior partners.' A man's seniority according to age was an important factor in his degree of eroticized power over either male or female sex partners.

Age is a factor in Hercules's narrative, from his struggle against serpents as an infant, to his Choice when a young adult, to his Labours and servitude to Omphale, when he is usually shown as a bearded, full adult. The responses of viewers, male and female and varying in age, could differ according to such

matters as the depicted age. Young princes, for instance, were often shown the Choice because the virile young Hercules was an exemplar, and the demigod was thereby established as an adorable icon, one that could easily arouse homoerotic attraction.²⁹ Older viewers need not have forgotten such sensual appeal either. The very eroticism of Hercules's admirable body through most of his life was probably one of the key reasons for its continual depiction, suitable for such audiences as potential brides, youths needing exemplars, or older men satisfied by the civic, active and virile model. To date, art-historical attention to homoerotic imagery of the Renaissance, if present at all, has had a propensity to concentrate on the feminized or androgynous youth, like Donatello's *David* or Michelangelo's *Ganymede*.³⁰ Patterns of sexual behaviour partly support such a focus, yet the erotic range is narrowed, and images with crossover rather than exclusive appeal tend to be neglected. While Antonio del Pollaiuolo's jaunty young *Hercules* in the Frick Collection might be acknowledged as having an ephebic, homoerotic allure, the older, bearded, heavily built and even more assertive *Hercules* in Berlin, attributed to the same artist, has largely been excluded from discourses of desire.³¹ But the subjectivity and amorous initiative of youths, and female viewers, cannot be denied; nor can the erotic nostalgia and ongoing desire of older men, some of whom loved adult men of varying ages.

The sensual appeal of the lithe youth was accompanied by an erotic charge in representations of the older, burly and ever-active hero. The very exaggeration of his masculinity, visualized in physical sturdiness as well as eternal, reiterated labour, presented a contrast with ideal ephebes or mortal men. Set apart and overly macho, Hercules enacted maleness in an amplified register. As Richard Dyer has pointed out, macho exaggeration requires 'the conscious deployment of signs of masculinity' and in that sense is close to camp and drag.³² The figure of Hercules reminds viewers that macho gender is a self-conscious performance rather than a universal, natural condition, and that male gender need not be always conflated with conventional sexuality. This study, then, aims to expand the scope of what kind of masculine figure carried homoerotic potential in the corpus of Renaissance art. It also works against any presumption that objects of homoerotic desire must be pubescent or pre-phallic or effeminate, as though only 'lack' can render a body attractive to an adult male. Nor can the agency of younger viewers be ignored. In particular, imagery of Hercules in close physical contact with Antaeus often conveyed an erotic subtext about both characters, one that was especially, but not exclusively, arousing for male viewers.

HERCULES AND ANTAEUS IN FLORENCE

When performing his taxing labours on earth, Hercules encountered the Libyan giant Antaeus. Especially in this feat, according to Florentine humanists like Salutati, Cristoforo Landino and Marsilio Ficino, libidinous allurements and sexual wiles are conquered.³³ Such scholars were adopting the mythographic tradition articulated by Fulgentius in the sixth century, allegorizing Hercules as the opponent of Antaeus's personification of lust. Yet that literally crushing victory is achieved against, and intertwined with, another humanized, embraced body, the only one in his various exploits, besides the giant Cacus, to feature a male opponent in human form. The physical conquest of sexual desire is visually presented in terms of sensual, somatic engagement. The physical contact evident



2 Nanni di Banco (attrib.), *Hercules*, c. 1395. Marble, dimensions. Florence: outer door jamb of Porta della Mandorla, Cathedral. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.

in two dimensions is tangibly accentuated in the case of numerous bronze statuettes.³⁴ The visualization of this seeming repression of sensual appetites could actually be a carnal scene.

The narratives, and textual glosses, engage in gendered, sexual politics, and the backdrop of a masculinized *patria* is central to Hercules's prominence in Florence. Already when he appeared on the civic seal in the late thirteenth century, inscribed 'Florence subdues depravity with a Herculean club', he enacted masculine domination and suppression.³⁵ As rendered in the emerald version of 1532 for the administration of the new, first Duke of Florence Alessandro de' Medici, the seal showed Hercules, club over his shoulder and lion skin held in his left hand, striding to the left, ever alert.³⁶ For the Cathedral's bell tower, Andrea Pisano carved a relief of *Hercules and Cacus* around 1335, celebrating, as did Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, the determined eradication of monsters and enactment of justice against a thief.³⁷ What seems to have been a painting of the standing Hercules was installed in the city's town hall sometime between 1385 and 1414, with a marble *titulus* emphasizing its political message. Like 'Florence, the image of virtue just like myself, the hero boasts, he has 'brought down ungrateful cities and overcome cruel tyrants.'³⁸ Hercules's civic significance as an exemplar of conquest and masculine virtue was further highlighted, but in the register of *interpretatio Christiana*, when he appeared as a standing hero or enacting three of his conquests, carved on the jamb of the Porta della Mandorla of the Florentine Cathedral in the 1390s (plates 2 and 3).³⁹ As Panofsky and Leopold Ettliger have argued, these religious citations of Hercules present his labours as *exempla virtutis*, as 'mythological antetypes in a Christian context' of moral allegory.⁴⁰

Men of the ruling class similarly cast the *civis* in a virile, Herculean light. The poet Franco Sacchetti, at some time after April 1377, praised Florence as the 'Hercole novo' waging its valiant labours against a range of enemies; Rinaldo degli Albizzi took a more personal approach around 1424–26, urging each citizen to be 'un nuovo Ercole' defeating the Visconti tyrants.⁴¹ Sacchetti, however, still

adhered to the more traditional picture of Florence as a female personification, therefore easily switching from 'Hercole novo' in one line to 'quest'alta Donna', this esteemed Lady 'Fiorenza mia' in the following lines. In the final stanza, the city in the form of 'New Hercules, joyous liberty/daughter of Rome and above every other woman' is praised for its fortitude and control.⁴² More commonly, affiliation with ancient history made Florentines sons of Rome, defending a fatherland (*patria*) which was sometimes given rhetorical form as a female allegory, to be protected by masculinized citizens. The allegorical process could make Hercules labile. In the imagery of men like Rinaldo degli Albizzi, the classical revival of the early fifteenth century is about refreshing the rhetoric and imagery of a pagan hero already Christianized during the Middle Ages, placing the masculine paragon in a self-consciously novel civic context of propaganda and personal exemplarity. Hercules, like Florence, is resurgent, bolstered by its remaking through mythic history.

Writing a treatise on Hercules around the time of these civic/religious images, the Florentine Chancellor Salutati (d. 1406) envisaged Hercules as the perfect embodiment of virtue and reason; in contrast, Antaeus was a symbol for every generic vice but especially, on etymological grounds, for the libido, because Antaeus came from Libya. As is shown by Guidoccio Cozzarelli's black *Libyan Sibyl*, designed in the 1480s for the pavement of Siena's Cathedral, Libya generally connoted Africa at the time.⁴³ With a tinge of racial superiority spicing Salutati's negative image of the African foe, Antaeus is said to have 'died from lack of nourishment', because he was separated from 'food and drink from whence lust is fed'.⁴⁴ Antaeus is crushed by the strength of Hercules once he is weakened when lifted from the earth and thence deprived of nurturing contact with his mother the earth goddess Gaia. Such was Ovid's emphasis, observing that the crux of the matter was the hero's success in depriving the threatening giant of *alimenta parentis*, or



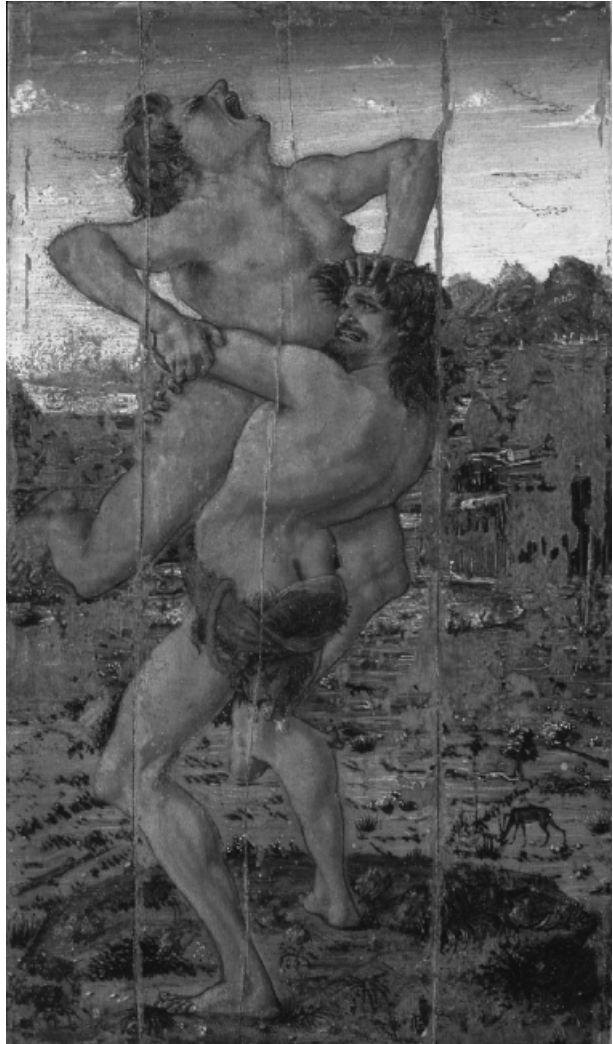
3 Detail of Piero di Giovanni Tedesco (attrib.), *Labours of Hercules*, c. 1395–1400. Marble, dimensions. Florence: left inner door jamb of Porta della Mandorla, Cathedral. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.

'his mother's nourishment' (*Metamorphoses* 9.184). Later writers continued to stress his feminine dependency, making the giant infantile and weak.⁴⁵ Hercules, by contrast, uses both brawn and brain, discovering his foe's weakness and exploiting it so that he is victorious over one who relies too much on the maternal bond.

Salutati provides a vivid description of explicitly effeminate Antaeus's death throes, with his vision dimming, sinews loosening, guts wounded, motion stilled and semen spilled.⁴⁶ Gigantic but legless, rendered literally baseless and morally base, Antaeus in the Cathedral relief (see plate 3) is gasping, locked in the chokehold of death by a Hercules whose face, hair and body type are not dissimilar. Ettlenger argued that the front-to-front arrangement institutes a Florentine formula, but in the first century C.E. Lucan's epic description of the battle had Hercules meeting his foe 'chest to chest'.⁴⁷ Whatever the longevity of the visual composition, the Florentine relief has the city's emblem caught in a mirror-like confrontation with an alter ego. Defender of the fatherland conquers a mother's boy; inferior size beats monstrous magnitude; superior virtue defeats bestial aggression; and an interior battle eventually conquers one's lesser self.

Prominent in location but diminutive in scale, the relief did not spur a rash of other Florentine versions, and the republican fervour of Herculean imagery seems to have dimmed. It is only in the mid-century that the deed is revived in that city, and then for a domestic, secular market. The impetus was probably the decoration around 1460 of the Sala Grande of the new Medici palace with three large paintings by the Pollaiuolo brothers, on cloth, each with gold frames, depicting Hercules battling with the Hydra, the Nemean Lion, and Antaeus.⁴⁸ Choosing the same three exploits featured on the Porta della Mandorla, the Medici cycle was doubtless a component of their clever appropriation of Florentine civic rhetoric.⁴⁹ On the other hand, public commissions of Herculean imagery ended well before Cosimo de' Medici returned to Florence in 1434; the imagery was as much Florentine as republican, kept alive amongst the populace by children making gigantic snowmen of Hercules. Sixteenth-century interest by the first two Medici dukes in the rhetoric of Hercules, especially his exploit with Antaeus, remodelled the Florentine, political hero in a personal and classicizing vein, appropriating patriotic and virile connotations to support the legitimacy, virtue and masculine strength of their centralizing authority.⁵⁰

The now-lost works by Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo are probably remembered in two miniature oil paintings by Antonio, which may date from as late as a decade or so after his large-scale productions, and may have adorned a desk or formed a precious diptych (plate 4).⁵¹ Various images, including two engravings by Cristofano Robetta at the end of the century, are also related to the influential Medici cycle.⁵² The palace inventory of 1492 described one of Pollaiuolo's canvases showing 'Hercules bursting (*scoppia*) Antaeus', a telling word because the explosive force of his crushing embrace is vividly captured even in the smaller version.⁵³ Toes curl and clutch, nipples stand erect, and breath bursts from Antaeus's collapsed lungs in orgasmic expiry. Hercules grips Antaeus's buttocks and the foes link arms in a circular dance of death. Action pivots around the fulcrum at Antaeus's genitals which are pressed against Hercules. The immense struggle is so great that Hercules is as bestial as his partner, with a deformed body, exaggerated spinal arch, popping eyes and gnashing teeth.



4 Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Hercules and Antaeus*, c. 1475. Oil on panel, 16 × 9 cm. Florence: Galleria degli Uffizi (Inv. 1890, no. 1478). Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

In the later 1470s, Pollaiuolo also produced – perhaps for the Medici palace – a bronze statuette of the combat between Hercules and Antaeus, which sets up a *paragone*, or comparison, between two works by the same artist in different media, exploring much of the same extravagant composition, now daringly realized in three dimensions (plate 5).⁵⁴ It follows the pattern of counterpoised strain between two figures facing each other and turning around a pressure point at Hercules's chest. For the Libyan giant, long understood to personify lust, the physical juncture with his enemy occurs at his genital site. Around this join, Pollaiuolo realizes the narrative's intrinsic movement and extension through space in a sequence of views from multiple angles. Exploiting the tensile strength of bronze, the sculptor can also display his anatomical knowledge and skill at presenting bodies in a variety of complex yet balanced postures, just as Leonardo da Vinci recommended.⁵⁵ Thrashing limbs, tensed muscles, arched backs, at least



5 Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Hercules and Antaeus*, c. 1475–80. Bronze, Height (including base) 46 cm (figures 36 cm). Florence: Museo Nazionale del Bargello (Inv. Bronzi 280). Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

partially naked buttocks and Antaeus's anguished neck and face thrown back in desperate struggle: all set the life-and-death conflict at a high pitch of affect and significance. The polished metal suggests the sweating sheen of the struggling bodies; protuberances such as muscles and rump gleam in the rich light cast on the dark bronze by natural light or by oil lamps and candles. When Antaeus's back is being observed, the viewer sees from this range of angles each man's genitals in a degree of alignment, with the divide of Antaeus's taut buttocks (barely hidden by his raised foot) above Hercules's genitals, which are enhanced by his supposedly modest lion skin.⁵⁶ (That the lion's face replaces Hercules's buttocks at another angle establishes a witty, self-conscious relationship between the artist and his audience in a further scatological joke).

As with the sometime close similarity between Virtue and *Voluptas* at the crossroads, or the resemblance between those same forces personified as Hercules and Antaeus on the Porta della Mandorla (see plate 3), here resemblances between the physique, hair and faces of the wrestling pair allows no easy dichotomization. Hence, clarification of masculine virtue is not predetermined. Such visual mirroring echoes Lucan's emphasis in his epic poem on the elongated struggle between the two men which, he comments, is caused by their parity. The two strong men were amazed to have met their match (4.620). 'They clashed as equals, one with the strength of Earth, the other with his own' (4.636–37), a line quoted by Salutati (3.27.6–7), and only Hercules's realization about the maternal source of his foe's strength tips the scales in favour of the wiser demigod. Like acrobats performing the 'Labores Herculis' in equipoise, or two bodies pivoting around the central fulcrum noted by Leonardo da Vinci, in some pictorial choices ideal masculinity is represented in suspension, forever asserting itself but in a struggle, the outcome assured yet not shown. Viewers learn that proper masculinity must always rise to each challenge; without such tests, masculinity does not seem to be proven. The psychoanalytic model of psychic anxiety at the core of male identity is current in many studies of early modern masculinity, but the mythological model of Herculean labours suggests, rather, that under patriarchy masculinity must be constructed as always in crisis, forever under threat, in order for manliness to come to the fore.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, the face-to-face personalized conflict had been represented outside Florence, in the context of an extended cycle of famous men. The lost frescoes decorating Cardinal Giordano Orsini's Roman palace were executed before 1432 by an artist in Masolino da Panicale's circle and survive in partial copies, the most complete being Leonardo da Besozzo's so-called *Crespi Cronica*, dated to the 1430s or early 1440s.⁵⁸ The immolation of Hercules occurs, and the one exploit of the hero selected for visual representation showed him clutching Antaeus's genital region to his chest while the two engaged in a death ballet of arched spines and spread legs.

The inclusion of these two scenes, but with a different composition for the labour, recurs in a later world chronicle produced in Florence during the 1460s or early to mid-1470s, after the Medicean revival sparked renewed awareness of the exemplary exploits (plate 6).⁵⁹ By refusing the civic and Medicean precedent of a face-to-face encounter, the composition in the 'Florentine Picture Chronicle' is unusual; by foregrounding pictorial homoerotics it is even more striking. Attributed to Baccio Baldini, Maso Finiguerra, or artists in their circle, the



6 Circle of Baccio Baldini or Maso Finiguerra, *Hercules and Antaeus*, c. 1470–75. Pen and brown ink and brown wash over black chalk, 32.6 × 22.6 cm. London: British Museum (1889,0527.33). Photo: Trustees of the British Museum.

drawings in the album often compile scenes by using figural elements selected from pattern books, yet the defeat of Antaeus is depicted in what seems to be an unique manner.⁶⁰ Hercules is placed behind his opponent but in a more equal embrace, resulting in heads and knees being on roughly the same level.⁶¹

The entwined, sodomitical couple, of a beardless youth and a fully bearded, mature adult, seems to share the same torso and the same genitals. Antaeus's

genitals hang between Hercules's legs as though the bodies have merged at the physical source of lust. Hercules now battles his own 'generic vice' within himself but the self-reflexivity of the action also brings into pictorial form a case of physical and sexual union. The setting is informed by the textual traditions regarding geography, for the Libyan Sibyl frames the double-page spread on the left and on the far right the wrestling couple emerge from the lair of Antaeus's cave, within a tall crag mentioned in Lucan's *Civil War* (4.601) and signifying Antaeus's removal from his mother Earth. His expulsion from his mother's womb-like enclosure brings Antaeus to the point of death rather than birth, and one desperately appealing hand directs the eye towards a bare, lopped tree trunk that contrasts with the flourishing tree behind him. Weakened by the cutting of an umbilical tie yet idealistically ephebic, gripped in the throes of death and desire, Antaeus suffers the orgasmic 'death' of passion.

Hercules is more in control, his feet on the ground and his mouth muffled in his partner's hair, rendering invisible facial expressiveness as well as genital arousal. Masculinized against the uncontrolled, gesticulating, passionately material Antaeus, Hercules is nevertheless engaged in a duet of sexual fury even as he kills the bestial enemy. He is shown as what was called the 'active' (*agens*) partner in sodomy while the implicitly penetrated Antaeus is the 'passive' (*patiens*) and womanly one, who legally was usually given a lesser punishment since he was deemed to be young and innocent.⁶² But the properly masculine, honourable initiative enacted by Hercules against his partner is heroic in terms of the myth. Juridical codes clash with cultural ones in this unusual Florentine imagining of sodomy performed in company with heroic murder. Battling his own passions and engaging in a death struggle with the externalized personification of sexual vice, Hercules is simultaneously implicated in the physical embodiment of those passions. He is masculine and victorious – both sodomitically and virtuously – while Antaeus is a 'passive', attractive and explicit object of homoerotic desire.

LANDINO AND FICINO ON THE LABOUR AGAINST ANTAEUS

Knowing the story's moral and the inevitable death of the Libyan giant cannot deflect a viewer from recognizing the pictorial thrust. Attempts by Landino and Ficino in the next two decades to evacuate any sexual innuendo in Hercules's actions sound awkward and ineffectual when set against this visual precedent.

When dedicating his treatise on nobility to Lorenzo de' Medici in the late 1480s, the Florentine humanist Landino gave a political and mildly Neoplatonic gloss to the now-popular story. In rather standard mythographic terms, the tale was considered an allegory of earthly desires and material attachments overcome by a consideration of higher, spiritual concerns.⁶³ But Landino's frame attends to civic ideals. Hercules is introduced as 'the most invincible leader of all mortals, who surely must be imitated'.⁶⁴ Such a political exemplar cannot be conceived in complex terms, and Landino emphatically confirmed the conventional allegorical interpretation of Antaeus's defeat. Standing for the 'irrational appetite [which] is always opposed to reason', Antaeus was a sign of the 'desire [for] earthly and perishable things' overcome only 'if our minds are lifted up on high to divine things and seized by the love of those things' so that 'all desire [*libido*] for earthly things completely perishes'.⁶⁵ A psychomachia, or internal struggle in the soul

against vice, attains moral victory when set in a nostalgic, mythic time of perfect masculinity. The dependence of masculine identity on a dichotomized opponent is homo-socialized in that the enemy is male, but cross-sexualized in that the vice is feminized, inferior and ultimately dominated. Self-control and wisdom earn immortality, that is, 'the highest and truest nobility' is attained only 'by way of all the civic and heroic virtues'.⁶⁶

In his earlier *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (1472), Landino emphasized civic virtue even more, having his former pupil Lorenzo de' Medici speak as a protagonist, who advocates the *vita activa* over the contemplative life. Lorenzo praises Hercules as a paragon of the active life. His wisdom 'served all men. For ... he destroyed horrendous wild beasts, vanquished pernicious and savage monsters, chastised the most cruel tyrants, restored justice and liberty to many peoples and nations.'⁶⁷ Probably remembering the three deeds pictured in epic proportions within the Medici Palace (the beastly Lion, monstrous Hydra and tyrannical Antaeus, respectively), Landino credits to the youth, now in his early twenties, ideas that the teacher may well have first rehearsed before those very paintings. When aged around eleven, along with his younger brother Giuliano, the boy Lorenzo would have been especially thrilled by the newly installed, over-life-size paintings. Lessons learned in that manner, and reiterated in political discourse, were to last a lifetime. In the Medici circle, but continuing earlier Florentine republican rhetoric, Hercules is represented as an exemplar of the active life and of civic leadership. Lorenzo, like most Florentines, equally knew that the realities of political manoeuvring and moral conduct were far more fraught with ambiguity and compromise.

Another teacher in the Medici circle, the Neoplatonist scholar Marsilio Ficino, took a more metaphysical stance when he wrote in a letter of 1 July 1477 that 'reason within us is called Hercules: he destroys Antaeus, that is the monstrous images of fantasy, when he lifts Antaeus up from the earth, that is, when he removes himself from the senses and physical images.' The other two labours popular in Florentine and Medicean imagery were read similarly by Ficino: Hercules 'also subdues the lion, meaning that he curbs passion. He cuts down the Hydra ... that is, he cuts off the force of desire ...'⁶⁸ In a sense, all Hercules's opponents were feminized by their vulnerability and ultimate weakness. But the Hydra comes closest to visual signification as female, when the multi-headed monster can be represented like the Gorgon, with snakes sprouting behind a woman's hair, as it is in a bronze roundel by Antico.⁶⁹

Commenting on fortune in a letter to Bernardo Bembo, Ficino tellingly contrasted Hercules with the effeminate, sensual and luxurious Sardanapalus, by legend the last King of Assyria: 'I would prefer to be Hercules rather than Sardanapalus. The one overcame as many monsters as overwhelmed the other; Hercules, having vanquished savage beasts, rose up as a god, while Sardanapalus was destroyed by beasts and made lower and more wretched than they.'⁷⁰ An irrational attention to worldly and less consequential matters is cast as a feminized distraction, just as Aristotelians typed matter as feminine against more important, masculine substance.⁷¹ Antaeus is then implicitly a 'passive' partner to the man who is an adult, independent, rational hero. Mere Aristotelian matter is subsumed when manly strength and masculine reason conquer the personification of flesh. Hercules's overpowering of monstrous illusions and lust would

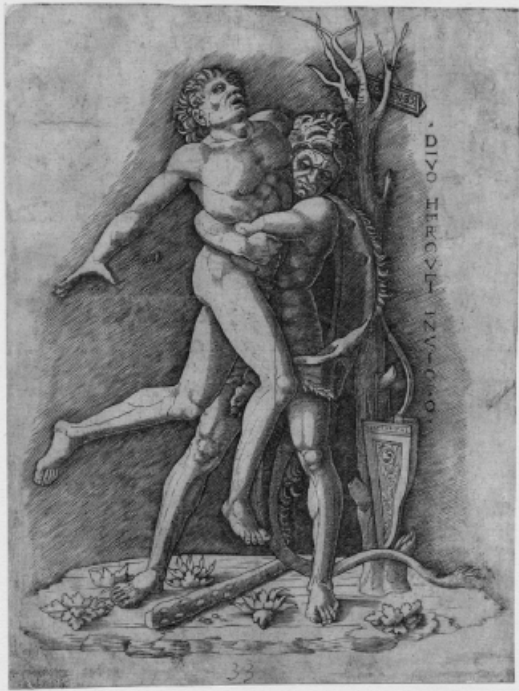
seem to make him asexual, yet the Neoplatonic stress on spiritual love, propounded by men like Ficino, could open the way for the justification of Hercules as a practitioner of virtuous, pure sensuality on a higher plane. The struggle between Hercules and Antaeus becomes a psychomachia between lust and virtue, fantasy and reason, feminine and masculine principles, earthly lust and divine love.

In the philosophically gendered system of men like Ficino, the rational epitome of ideal masculinity, wielding his phallic club, is opposed to multiple, voracious monsters that embody passion, desire and fantasy. As we have seen, Filarete noted that 'it would not be . . . appropriate to him if he did not seem to be undergoing great struggles'; Salutati's etymology claimed for Hercules's name the sense of being 'glorious in strife'.⁷² To Ficino, the virtuous decision against Venus at the crossroads thereafter committed Hercules to a life in which he was 'vexed perpetually with the work of labours'.⁷³ His worrying labours show him always at the work of gender, for he is forever in the process of attaining masculine identity, in a series of interdependent oppositions with feminized, inferior foes. Although Herculean efforts were sometimes read in Neoplatonic terms, Landino clearly considered the civic aspect, and the gendered component indicates that philosophical abstraction was complemented by the power of embodiment.

MANTUA AND NORTHERN ITALY

While Landino and Ficino were writing in Florence, Andrea Mantegna and other North Italian artists were beginning to saturate the market with images of Hercules and Antaeus that visualized close, sensual contact between naked men. The Mantuan performance of Poliziano's *Orfeo* in 1480 seems to have struck a particular chord. Six of Hercules's exploits were already frescoed around 1465 by Mantegna on the *Camera picta*'s ceiling in the ducal palace of Mantua, perhaps because decades earlier, when still a boy, Marquis Lodovico Gonzaga had been nicknamed Ercole by his tutor Vittorino da Feltre.⁷⁴ It was in the Mantuan circle of Mantegna and his followers that production of images of Hercules with Antaeus began during the last quarter or so of the fifteenth century, spreading as far as France by the early sixteenth century. Also in Mantua, Antico's bronze statuettes of *Hercules and Antaeus* (for Bishop Lodovico Gonzaga c. 1500 and for Isabella d'Este in 1519) reconstruct and complete the model of an antique marble torso.⁷⁵

Mantegna referred to the damaged classical prototype – or a similar record preserved in a medal – of Hercules lifting Antaeus from behind, adapting the pose for a spandrel in the *Camera picta*. Some time later, he or his workshop and followers produced several versions in prints and drawings, primarily depicting the struggle either face to face or with Antaeus half-turned, which enabled more decorous masking of the genital regions (see plate 7).⁷⁶ The Mantuan court's interest in Herculean feats was further fostered upon the marriage of Marquis Francesco and Isabella d'Este in 1490. Daughter of Ercole d'Este, whose name both signalled and increased cultural interest in Hercules at the court of Ferrara, she went on to name her own son after the paternal namesake. Antico's figure, a poignantly classical hero of virtuous conquest, might have been of special interest to Isabella's fourteen-year-old son Ercole Gonzaga (born 23 November 1505) when newly made, and again in later years when he returned to the exemplar. Due to their episodic, heroic nature, Hercules's deeds were readily assimilated into an



7 (left) Giovanni Antonio da Brescia, *Hercules and Antaeus*, 1507 or later. Engraving, 23.2 × 17.2 cm. London: British Museum (1845,0825.703). Photo: Trustees of the British Museum.

8 (right) School of Andrea Mantegna, *Hercules and Antaeus*, 1470–1500. Engraving, 30.3 × 20.9 cm. London: British Museum (V,1.61). Photo: Trustees of the British Museum.

ongoing interest in chivalric tales, one catered to by the production of such stories for schoolboys as well as older readers.⁷⁷

Soon the popularity of Mantegna's prints engendered numerous copies, variants, revisions and reissues, spreading beyond Mantua to engage artists like Giovanni Antonio da Brescia, Nicoletto da Modena, Moderno and Luca Signorelli, as well as men in the Raphaellesque circle, including Marcantonio Raimondi (plates 7 and 8).⁷⁸ The sheer number of surviving prints (as well as the occasional drawing or plaquette) suggests that the wrestling match was a top seller, sometimes serving not only as a didactic or inspirational gift but also as a love token to boys and young men. In all the examples from the later part of the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century, in various media and a range of scale, the narrative of Hercules and Antaeus provided an opportunity for the representation of two naked and muscular male bodies in physical, intimate contact. In some examples, like Antico's bronze statuette, the genitals are visible but not in any special or close relationship. At other times, a more modest viewership is assumed and genitals are largely hidden (see plate 7). In either case, there is an air of strained physical action which displays culturally approved concepts of masculine vigour, heroic conquest and close bodily encounter.

In other cases, overt genital contact is represented.⁷⁹ Mantegna's fresco almost covers Hercules's genitals behind the back of Antaeus's lower thigh and

hence a viewer could fantasize that Antaeus was expiring in a sexual embrace. As in the 'Florentine Picture Chronicle' (see plate 6), the strategy of placing one naked male body behind another's rear, with genital closeness intimated, tended to connote sodomitical relations of the kind regularly practised in cities like Florence. Perhaps to avoid such erotic suggestiveness, some images raise Antaeus even higher above Hercules's head, as did Antico's statuette. One strand of prints derived from Mantegna's design, dated c. 1490, turns Antaeus around so that his face is hidden from the viewer (see plate 8). Neither his suffering nor any hint of sexual expiration can therefore be indicated by facial expression, but the physical contact is still intense. His chest, with one breast and sensitive nipple visible, is squeezed against Hercules's brow, his toes are clenched, the genitals rub against the hero's chest, Antaeus's legs are spread to show his testicles, and the admirably compact buttocks are highlighted.

Often inscribed '*Divo Herculi invicto*' ('to the godlike and invincible Hercules'), the prints grant divine status to Hercules overcoming lust in a representation replete with genital contact and sensual bodily display.⁸⁰ No wonder the demigod served rulers and warriors as a fictive ancestor as well as role model. However, even the contemporary biographer of the Commander of Venetian forces, Bartolomeo Colleoni, was sceptical in the early 1470s about that soldier's genealogical claims to Herculean descent. His ancestral allegations had been implied on the reverse of a medal issued around 1457–58 that seemed to depict Hercules Invictus.⁸¹ More scathing was Pietro Aretino's reference in 1534 to the man, whose last testament had resulted in a grandiose equestrian monument designed and cast in bronze by Andrea del Verrocchio, eventually unveiled in a prominent Venetian square in March 1496. Tavern quips about the vain, fame-seeking mercenary seem to be remembered in Aretino's 'father General' pretentiously dressed up and strutting around a nunnery-turned-brothel, likened to the military general called 'Bortolameo Cogliani'.⁸² More than once, Aretino played on the general's name, turning Colleoni into the like-sounding *cogliani* (testicles), a satire invited by the coat of arms that indeed displayed testicles.⁸³ Aretino's implication was that, rather than 'ballsy' the man was 'full of bollocks' (*coglioneria*). Militaristic heroics, then, were not always treated with unmitigated awe, and the sight of testicles, visibly hanging from Verrocchio's steed or notable in the battle between Hercules and Antaeus, could signify proper virility, excessive cockiness or erotic sensitivity.

MICHELANGELO AND PSYCHOMACHIA

Early in the sixteenth century Michelangelo Buonarroti's graphic explorations of the theme of Hercules and Antaeus typically sought to invest the exploit with new visual dynamism and also suggested his own engagement with the sensual excitements and challenges of the myth. Having assuaged his sorrow over Lorenzo de' Medici's death in 1492 by carving a marble Hercules, it is possible that, as James Saslow claims, 'Michelangelo understood the ancient hero as a symbol of strong male-male affinity' and friendship.⁸⁴ The snowman that Michelangelo is reported to have made in the courtyard of the Medici palace in January 1494 may also have been a Hercules, like those built regularly by Florentine children whose winter play populated the city with civic emblems, such as the lion, or a six-foot Hercules placed next to the town hall in 1409.⁸⁵

Also outside the Palazzo Vecchio, Michelangelo was commissioned in the first decade of the sixteenth century to produce what was surely a Herculean pendant to his *David*, a project that ultimately resulted instead in Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*.⁸⁶ Drawings from the mid-1520s and now in the British Museum, London and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (plates 9 and 10), show that Michelangelo pondered the exploit with Antaeus, probably for the protracted project in the Piazza della Signoria.⁸⁷ The proportions of a marble block matching his *David* would have made certain configurations of the wrestlers impossible to represent, and the drawings focus on an especially close meshing of bodies, compressed together by technical as well as moral implications. The two form 'one unit of movement', as Ursula Hoff noted, adding about the Ashmolean sketch that 'Antaeus' head movement expresses the pathos of pain in the manner of the *Laocoön*. The figures seem forever interlocked in a struggle without end.'⁸⁸ On the Oxford sheet, the rivals are face to face, but the elevated Antaeus twists away in a serpentine fury; in the London drawing, torsoes face each other, but Antaeus is wound so that his buttocks abut Hercules's genitals, creating an even more physically intimate engagement. In each case, Michelangelo envisaged Antaeus so united with Hercules that he seems to rise up from the genital site of creation like a tormented alter ego and Hercules's soul grapples with itself over the dilemma of physical arousal. Like the artist of the 'Florentine Picture Chronicle', Pollaiuolo, or Hans Baldung Grien, to name just a few, Michelangelo did not readily polarize



9 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Four grotesque heads and Hercules and Antaeus*, c. 1524–25. Red chalk, 25.4 × 34.8 cm. London: British Museum (1859,0625.557 recto). Photo: Trustees of the British Museum.

the two combatants, instead understanding them as ambivalent or, rather, interdependent.

Michelangelo's poem on the verso of the Ashmolean sheet ponders the need for repentance and redirection as death approaches.⁸⁹ Spurred to such thoughts by his aged reflection in a mirror, and declaring his sense that he is an 'enemy of myself' (*nemico di me stesso*) because mortal feelings such as 'false hopes and empty desire/- weeping, loving, burning, and sighing' have kept him 'far away from the truth', Michelangelo grapples with the conflict explored later on the other side of the sheet. Although he does not name the mythic protagonists, who are locked in an unresolved struggle, the poem notes that 'Now that time is changing and sloughing off my hide,/death and my soul make constant trial together (*insieme*),/ the second and the first, for my final state.' The mirrored intertwining of the two male figures echoes Michelangelo's moving psychomachia or trial between his soul and his mortal, passionate *nemico* within. Faced by forthcoming death and needing to find 'truth' rather than sensual and earthly desires, Michelangelo's pen and chalk, at different times, delved into the divided elements which battle *insieme*, as the soul struggles to overcome material, fleshly desires. His crisis of conscience is visually encoded in the embodied terms of homoerotic temptation.

A more finished red-chalk drawing, which may relate to others he presented to his favourite Tommaso de' Cavalieri around 1530 (plate 11), returns to the same three Herculean exploits that once decorated the Medici Palace.⁹⁰ Between the conquests of the Nemean Lion and the Lernean Hydra, Hercules battles with Antaeus. The foe is inverted; he curves over in a foetal position and struggles with his head close to Hercules's genitals, as though the seat of reason is now directly



10 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Hercules and Antaeus and other sketches*, recto, c. 1524–25. Red chalk with some light drawing in pen and ink, 28.8 × 42.7 cm. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum (1844.63) recto. Photo: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



11 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Labours of Hercules*, c. 1530. Red chalk, 27.2 × 42.2 cm. Windsor: Royal Library. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2008 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

confronted with the source of lust.⁹¹ Lifted well away from his mother Earth, Antaeus has lost the battle and the Herculean triumph of reason might be signified by the masking of the genital area by a head, usually the seat of reason, but here it signifies the demented mind of a bestial enemy, whilst also implying the performance of oral sex. As in the earlier drawings, Antaeus has attenuated lower limbs and is enfolded in an interlocked relationship with the torso and genital region of Hercules; he seems to arise from the body of the masculine hero. Sprouting a monster from his genitals and torso, Hercules wrestles with a prodigy and gives birth to a phantasm who is an 'enemy of myself'. Michelangelo's conception of the theme recalls Ficino's internalization of the battle where 'reason within us is called Hercules', and he vanquishes monstrous fantasies 'when he removes himself from the senses'.

Another drawing by Michelangelo of the mid-1520s or early 1530s (plate 12), whether or not it refers specifically to Hercules, shows two nudes similarly wrestling in erotic, physical ardour. One arm reaches for his partner's genitals; one leg is placed between two others; and the bodies twist and writhe as though trying to disappear into each other. The accompanying poem voices poignant amazement at the 'new and strange anguish' of love, which 'hurts me more the more grace I receive.'⁹² Here the contradictions of love are played out in a passionate fury of urgent desire. Poem and drawing each present a stunned commitment to the pain and struggle as well as grace of desire. Herculean self-control and Neoplatonic distancing is willingly disavowed for the pleasure of



12 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Two Nude Men Wrestling*, mid-1520s or mid-1530s. Red chalk, 23.7 × 19.2 cm. Paris: Louvre (Inv 709 recto). Photo: Réunion des musées nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

losing one's senses in love. Like the drawings of Hercules and Antaeus, this sheet tangibly imagines the close, sweating embrace of two male bodies linked almost as though arising from a single marble block. Unlike the other drawings and the Ashmolean poem, the exploration in this sketch and verse does not repress the libido but imagines homoerotic desire in less guilty, more immediate and fervent terms.

PATHOS, ECSTASY AND SCEPTICISM

Depending on the image, and the viewer, emotive responses to Hercules and Antaeus varied. Hoff discerned a trend during the course of the fifteenth century, from Hercules's certain victory announced by Antaeus's passive suspension, to Pollaiuolo's energized, violent staging, to the interest shown by Mantegna and others like Michelangelo in 'the pathos of surrender'.⁹³ Vasari noted of Pollaiuolo's now-lost canvas that Antaeus was opening his mouth, gasping, and finally, slowly, giving up the ghost. Words from a partly mutilated poem found on another section of Michelangelo's drawing in Paris evoke anguish, anger and fury, as well as the soul and death.⁹⁴ Just such a mixture of pain and passion, suffering and spirituality, are evoked in the pathos of Antaeus's demise. The link with his mother's nourishment is broken irrevocably; sensual appetites fade; death approaches. The body language and, when seen, Antaeus's facial expression, eloquently intimate that the loss of passion and life is bitter and sorrowful. The very rationality and impassivity of Hercules, often emphasized, accentuates a melancholic loss of its opposite, which is pictured in the form of superb, young flesh at the height of physical conditioning. Admiration for the demigod's superhuman, virtually impossible, wisdom and strength is balanced by empathy for the vanquished sensuality every mortal citizen found hard to banish utterly.

The heightened, passionate engagement of the combat has a sensual, even erotic, affect in itself. The 'death' of orgasm is writ large here, in a sense, for pathos mingles with ecstatic removal of self from self. In a Neoplatonic key, the spirit rises up out of the dead but elevated body of the giant; in the allegorical and mythographic sense, libido is conquered by reason; in a material and visual sense, sensuality is registered in moving pathos and anguish. After all, a long-lived figure for orgasmic release and post-coital languor was 'death' or the 'little death' suffered after libidinous battles in which one was 'killed', 'finished off' or 'spent'.⁹⁵ As was often the case, Aretino articulated what others might not dare, but thereby he recorded one way in which it was possible to interact with learned conventions on a more earthy level. Precisely that ancient exemplar of artistic pathos, the *Laocoön*, recently unearthed in Rome in 1506, struck Aretino in several ways. The *dolore* of the father's struggle against the serpent is what Aretino praised in his attempt at respectable verse, the *Marfisa* written in Mantua around 1527–29. No longer seeking court patronage but deciding to make money on the public stage of printed books, around five or so years later Aretino again reminded readers of the classical paragon. At the moment of orgasmic relief, General Colleoni in the orgiastic convent 'wore that frowning look the marble statue at the Vatican Museum gives the snakes that are strangling him between his sons'.⁹⁶ Of course, such bawdy irreverence is not adequate to Michelangelo's anguish or Pollaiuolo's violence; nevertheless, it is a reminder that in the early modern world, from Neoplatonic heights to the depths of the sensually provocative, as Pierre de Ronsard put it, 'Love and death are but the same thing.'

Hercules was a notable test case for Renaissance attempts to reinforce patriarchy, define masculinity and contain sexualities when none were untested fields. Masculinity was dependent upon a continuous struggle over the selection of particular behaviours, roles and narratives. Multiple in roles and

deeds, Hercules was, during the Renaissance, both mad and heroic, impassioned and implacable, driven and divine. Rarely can we know what Renaissance women thought of the excessively masculine Hercules. Two voices from the first half of the fifteenth century were sceptical. The female humanist Isotta Nogarola extolled the heights women could reach, citing various exploits in history, and at one point asking her male correspondent: 'Did not the Amazons build a state without men? . . . For they were so strongly endowed with *virtus* [valour/virtue] and with remarkable military skill that to Hercules and Theseus it seemed impossible to bring the force of the Amazons under their rule.'⁹⁷

That Hercules eventually won the girdle of the Amazonian queen Hippolyta is conveniently passed over, for Nogarola's more important point was that women too were gifted with potent *virtus*, with military and political acumen. Women like Nogarola may have found especially delicious Omphale's triumph over effeminized Hercules.

Another woman writer was cautious about the effect of the Herculean model upon young men, an audience especially targeted with images of the demigod, on birth spoons or trays, in statuettes, paintings and public entries, showing him at the crossroads or performing his labours. Christine de Pizan did not find Hercules such a great exemplar for a fifteen-year-old boy aspiring to be a knight. Her mythographic *Letter of Othea to Hector* (c. 1400) finds commendable Hercules's loyal assistance to friends when rescuing Proserpina from Hades. However, 'it is not at all necessary to you/To acquire arms and make/A journey to battle with . . . serpentine things', as did Hercules.⁹⁸ After scoffing at these deeds, the Goddess of Wisdom does approve self-defence, 'constancy and firmness' and a similar strength which is 'unyielding against carnal desires', so on the allegorical level this female writer could use Hercules as a moral but not a literal example for a boy reared on chivalric tales. Referring to the illustrations to her text, she wrote 'Toward Hercules you ought to turn/And gaze at his worthiness.' By such a division between ostensible narrative and moralizing justification, Hercules could be seen by women, children and philosophizing men as a proper, decorous subject.

The images themselves, however, show that Hercules's battle against lust – personified in such figures as Omphale, Antaeus or *Voluptas* to one side of the Choice – was not only a subject for moralizing and political allegory but also a narrative that could excite the erotic fantasy of artists and viewers. Whether in the political context of courts or cities, Hercules during the Renaissance ostensibly performed masculine control of the passions through the exercise of rational might and moral courage, yet at the same time the visual imagination embodied the struggle in sombre, sensual and witty ways. Bronze statuettes of Hercules made for display in palace interiors can only refer obliquely to civic or grand-scale public virtue and in these objects the tactile possibilities of sensually polished bronze, which also warms to the touch, would increase any apprehension of the subject as sensual. Prints were openly shown or privately enjoyed, welcoming close and repeated inspection as one followed every somatic detail marvellously wrought in the new technology of figurative printing. Women and men saw images of Hercules in a variety of circumstances and with a range of responses. It is clear that the possible understandings of the complex figure of Hercules included high-minded asexuality, recondite moralizing, political allegory, gendered contrast, homoerotic engagement and vernacular amusement.

Notes

- 1 Key literature on Hercules during the Renaissance includes Erwin Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst*, Leipzig, 1930; Leopold D. Ettlinger, 'Hercules Florentinus', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, 16, 1972, 119–42; G. Karl Galinsky, *The Hercules theme: Adaptations of the hero in literature from Homer to the Twentieth century*, Oxford, 1972, chap. 9; Stephen Orgel, 'The example of Hercules' in Walther Killy, ed., *Mythographie der frühen Neuzeit: Ihre Anwendung in den Künsten*, Wiesbaden, 1984, 25–47. A recent overview, chiefly of the sixteenth century, is available in Malcolm Bull, *The mirror of the gods*, Oxford, 2005, 86–140. On the nude Hercules-Fortitude carved c. 1395 for the Florentine Cathedral's Porta della Mandorla, see Mary Bergstein, *The sculpture of Nanni di Banco*, Princeton, 2000, 26–30, 82–7, which attributes the precocious work to Nanni.
- 2 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, ed. Piero Buscaroli, Vicenza, 2000, 473–4.
- 3 Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular bodies. Gender, genre and the action cinema*, London, 1993, 9. A gender analysis of Rubens's allegorical mode in relation to his visualization of Hercules's masculinity, pictured as either virtuous or indulgent (being intoxicated), is conducted in Lisa Rosenthal, 'Manhood and statehood: Rubens's construction of heroic virtue', *Oxford Art Journal*, 16: 1, 1993, 92–111.
- 4 Norman Austin, *Meaning and being in myth*, University Park, PA, 1990, 110.
- 5 On 'the essential ambivalence' of Hercules in ancient Greece, see Nicole Loraux, 'Herakles: The super-male and the feminine', in David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma Zeitlin, eds, *Before sexuality: The construction of erotic experience in the ancient Greek world*, Princeton, 1990, 21–52.
- 6 The interdependence of gender construction is particularly demonstrated in his choice at the crossroads between two feminine allegories (Virtue and Vice), and when his effeminate servitude to Omphale results in a mockery that works to reinforce normative gender roles.
- 7 Some paintings on wedding chests or wall panels represented Hercules: see, for example, Paul Schubring, *Cassoni*, Leipzig, 1923, nos 33 and 339 (symbolizing Fortitude), 335–7, 379, 582 (in the *Triumph of Fame*), 820 and *passim*; John Pope-Hennessy and Keith Christiansen, *Secular painting in 15th-century Tuscany*, New York, 1980, 14–15. The labours appear on ceramic ware. For three plates showing Hercules and Antaeus, see Jörg Rasmussen, *The Robert Lehman Collection. X: Italian majolica*, Princeton, 1989, no. 32; Alain Gruber, ed., *The History of Decorative Arts. The Renaissance and Mannerism in Europe*, New York, 1994, 281 (the Victoria and Albert Museum); and for a plate in Washington, see below. Statuettes were intimate, domestic objects, but not necessarily ones readily available to all women in the household. Other, fixed decoration in a palace placed Hercules on permanent display, however. In 1501 Giuliano da Sangallo executed mantelpiece figures of *Hercules* and *Samson* for the Palazzo Gondi: Paola Barocchi, ed., *Il giardino di San Marco. Maestri e compagni del giovane Michelangelo*, Milan, 1992, 45–7 no. 8. For a damaged, late fifteenth-century fresco of the standing *Hercules* in the Palazzo Bardi-Serzelli of Florence, see Barocchi, 26, 28, 32 n. 85, which also notes '2 *Hercoli dipinti*' in the inventory of Francesco di Angelo Gaddi, and the purchase in 1472 by Lorenzo Morelli of an 'ercholetto di gesso'. A relief of *Hercules* and *Cacus* (c. 1500) remains in the Palazzo Guicciardini: Alison Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers: The arts of Florence and Rome*, London, 2005, 531, no. 74.
- 8 The *Hercules* is associated with Medicean loyalty in Philip Jacks and William Caferro, *The Spinelli of Florence: Fortunes of a Renaissance merchant family*, University Park PA, 2001, 134, 137–40, 271, and only the *Cupid* is understood to relate to the betrothals. The *sgraffito* work, a new technique at the time, is dated imprecisely (112–34), and perhaps it was commissioned after the engagements, in the early 1460s, closer to the period when the young ladies were old enough for the weddings to proceed (1464, 1466 and 1469, for which see 245–7). Furthermore, the incised picture does not resemble records of the Medici painting (137–8). Elizabeth Cropper, *Pontormo: 'Portrait of a halberdier'*, Los Angeles, 1997, 72–3 gives the salutary warning that 'not every image of Hercules around 1530 is associable with the Medici' and that not all have political messages. The same could be said for the fifteenth century. Cogent doubts have been raised about Lorenzo de' Medici's ownership of Pollaiuolo's statuette of *Hercules* and *Antaeus*: Alison Wright, 'The myth of Hercules' in Gian Carlo Garfagnini, ed., *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo mondo: Convegno internazionale di studi (Firenze, 9–13 giugno 1992)*, Florence, 1994, 331–2; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 334–40.
- 9 Meg Licht, 'Elysium: A prelude to Renaissance theater', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 49, 1996, 6, 7, 18–19, 26.
- 10 The description is by Sir Thomas Smyth, in a letter from Paris to Burghley of 18 June 1572: K. M. Lea, *Italian popular comedy*, vol. 2, New York, 1962, 348. For other cases of the 'Forze d'Ercole' being performed, at least as early as 1528, see 406–7.
- 11 For hat badges see Cropper, *Pontormo: 'Portrait of a halberdier'*, 68–75. For the Triumphs of Hercules in a tapestry of c. 1517–20, see Thomas P. Campbell, et al., eds, *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and magnificence*, London, 2002, no. 26. Francesco di Giorgio's illuminated roundels are discussed in Luke Syson et al., *Renaissance Siena: Art for a City*, London, 2007, 180–1, with earlier bibliography.

- 12 For a selection of bronze statuettes of the standing *Hercules*, see Wendy Stedman Sheard, *Antiquity in the Renaissance*, Northampton, MA, 1978, nos 32, 34; Sybille Ebert-Schiffener, ed., *Natur und Antike in der Renaissance*, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, nos. 89–93, 97–8, 101–102, 320, 323; Manfred Leithe-Jasper, *Renaissance master bronzes from the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna*, New York, 1986, nos. 11, 36; James David Draper, *Bertoldo di Giovanni. Sculptor of the Medici household. Critical reappraisal and catalogue raisonné*, London, 1992, figs. 24–6, 36, 131, 136; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 334–5. On Piero della Francesca's fresco of a standing *Hercules*, taken from his family's house in Borgo San Sepolcro and now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, see Creighton Gilbert, 'The *Hercules* in Piero's house', *Artibus et Historiae*, 23, 2002, 107–116.
- 13 Jeremy Warren, 'Bronzes in the Wernher Collection', *Apollo* 155, no. 483 (May 2002), 25–7.
- 14 Statius, *Silvae*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Cambridge, MA, 2003, 283 (4.6.32: 'castae genius tutelaque mensae').
- 15 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and renaissances in western art*, Stockholm, 1965, 155 (my emphasis), also 68, 96, 147, 150 n. 4, 176.
- 16 In the case of Dominique Fernandez, *A hidden love. Art and homosexuality*, Munich, 2002, 129–34, it is stated with refreshing, if anachronistic, certainty that *Hercules* was 'bisexual'. Almost in passing, the historian John Hale was able to avoid convention and observe that Landino's Neoplatonism 'hardly explains the gusto' with which *Hercules* is represented in close union with *Antaeus*, suggesting there might be 'an added jolt from the homo-erotic element in Renaissance life and culture': J. R. Hale, *Artists and warfare in the Renaissance*, London, 1990, 157. Bull, *The mirror of the gods*, 106, noted in passing that 'there is often something weirdly sexual about the confrontation.' Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 334 observed that 'the frequently sensual rendering' of *Hercules* in bronze statuettes 'could even lend *Hercules* an implicitly erotic charge, though this aspect of his potency is not registered – nor was it likely to be – in contemporary sources.'
- 17 Antonio Averlino detto il Filarete, *Trattato di Architettura*, eds Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi, Milan, 1972, vol. 2, 660: 'ardito e robusto ... Ben sai che quando e' sostiene il cielo per aiutare Attalante, e quando ancora e' tenne sul petto Anteo, che non paresse che durasse fatica non sarebbe atta figura, né appropriata a lui'; translated in Filarete, *Treatise on architecture*, ed. and trans. John Spencer, London, 1965, 307. Similarly, Bruni observed that '*Herculeum magni labores celebratiorem fecere, quam si numquam tam periculose laborasset*': Leonardo Bruni Aretino, *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron, Berlin, 1928, 148; 'the labours of *Hercules* made him more famous than he would have been had he never had to face such dangers': Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins and David Thompson, eds, *The humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, Binghamton, 1987, 196.
- 18 For *Hercules* and especially his labours, see Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.4.8–7.8; James Hall, *Dictionary of subjects and symbols in art*, revised edn, New York, 1979, 147–53; Dieter Blume, 'Herkules oder die Ambivalenz des Heros' in Ebert-Schiffener, *Natur und Antike in der Renaissance*, 131–9; Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance artists and antique sculpture*, London, 1986, 163–75; Jane Davidson Reid, *The Oxford guide to classical mythology in the arts, 1300–1990s*, Oxford, 1993, vol. 1, 515–61; H. David Brumble, *Classical myths and legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A dictionary of allegorical meanings*, London, 1998, 154–66. His encounter with *Antaeus* is not one of the proper, canonical labours, but appears, for instance, in Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.11; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* 4.17.4–5; Philostratus, *Imagines* 2.21; Lucan, *Civil war* 4.589–655; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 9.184; Pindar, *Isthmian odes* 4.52–55; the Mythographers (*Scriptores rerum mythicarum Latini tres*, ed. George Heinrich Bode, Cellis, 1834, vol. 1, 19, 131, 247); see Brumble, 26–7 and Reid, 533–5.
- 19 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown, Cambridge, MA, 2001, 94–5, with parallel Latin text: 'Vigilandum igitur est et robore plurimo nobis armanda sunt corda; ... laboribus assiduis est premenda lascivia.'
- 20 Coluccio Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, ed. B. L. Ullman, Zurich, 1951, vol. 2, 585.
- 21 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie doerum gentiliium libri*, ed. Vincenzo Romano, Bari, 1951, vol. 2, 633 (13.1, finished in 1373); Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, vol. 2, 591.
- 22 Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, vol. 2, 634: 'ad arduum illum virtutum ascensum, si non cedere sed pugnare'.
- 23 Lucian, *I dialoghi piacevoli, le vere narrationi, le facete epistole di Luciano filosofo*, Venice, 1551, 171 verso ('sta inclinato alla libidine'). Taken to be by Lucian, the text was first published in Greek in Florence in 1496, first published in a Latin translation in Venice in 1494, and printed in an Italian translation in Venice in 1525, several times reissued thereafter.
- 24 Antonii Panhormitae, *Hermaphroditus*, ed. Donatella Coppini, vol. 1, Rome, 1990, 1.7.13: 'gnovit Hylas, patrio percibus ab Hercule busto'.
- 25 Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti, *L'Orfeo del Poliziano*, Padua, 1986, 163, 182 (*Orfeo* 289–90): 'a questo santo amore Ercole cede/che vinse il mondo [or: i monstri] e dal bello Hyla è vinto.' In using the same verb, *vincere*, for both *Hercules*'s victories and the amorous conquest of him by his beautiful young assistant, Poliziano's verse implies that *Hercules*'s worldwide battles with *monstri* like *Antaeus* were similarly sensual. Poliziano's strategy of inversion with 'santo amore' was later adopted by Benvenuto Cellini, whose response

- upon being cursed as a sodomite was to counter: 'I wish to God I did know how to indulge in such a noble practice (*nobile arte*): after all, we read that Jove enjoyed it with Ganymede in paradise, and here on earth it is the practice of the greatest emperors and the greatest kings of the world. I'm an insignificant, humble man, I haven't the means or the knowledge to meddle in such a marvellous matter (*una così mirabil cosa*): *Autobiography*, trans. George Bull, Harmondsworth, 1956, 338 (2.71).
- 26 Theocritus, *Idyll* 13, in the Loeb volume *The Greek bucolic poets*, trans. J. M. Edmonds, revised edn, London, 1928, 156–63. Other versions of the tale do not address Hercules's love so evocatively, though his furious search also features in Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 1.1261–72. On the other hand, Martial satirically noted that Hercules made Hylas bend over like a bow: 11.43.5. On Hylas see also Brumble, *Classical myths and legends*, 174; Reid, *The Oxford guide to classical mythology*, vol. 1, 618–20. His capture by the nymphs appears on domestic paintings: Schubring, *Cassoni*, nos 296, 411; Pope-Hennessy and Christiansen, *Secular painting*, fig. 24. At least twice, Hercules and Hylas stand out on the Argo, awaiting the landing on Mysia: Schubring, nos 616, 669. In the case of a panel in Padua's Museo Civico, attributed to Lorenzo Costa, Hercules looks back towards young, svelte Hylas with a longing look: Paola Tosetti Grandi, entry in Alessandro Ballarin and Davide Banzato, eds, *Da Bellini a Tintoretto. Dipinti dei Musei Civici di Padova dalla metà del Quattrocento ai primi del Seicento*, Rome, 1991, no. 11.
- 27 Jacopo Sannazaro, *Opera latina scripta ex secundis curis Jani Broukhusii*, Amsterdam, 1728, 236, 241 (2.20, 2.34). Exclusion from all previous editions is noted in William J. Kennedy, *Jacopo Sannazaro and the uses of pastoral*, London, 1983, 62, 66.
- 28 Michael Roche, *Forbidden Friendships. Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, Oxford, 1996, 94–105, 113–19 (quoted from 95, 97, 116). For age differences in Venice, see Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford, 1985, 120 at n. 34, 121–5, 139–40 and *passim*.
- 29 Panofsky, *Hercules*, 84; E. Tietze-Conrat, 'Notes on "Hercules at the crossroads"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 14 (1951), 308–309 and pl. 52 b; Friedrich Polleröf, 'From the exemplum virtutis to the apotheosis: Hercules as an identification figure in portraiture: An example of the adoption of classical forms of representation' in Allen Ellenius, ed., *Iconography, propaganda, and legitimation*, Oxford, 1998, 40–3, and 37–62 for Hercules as a model for princes more widely, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.
- 30 For example, James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society*, New Haven, 1986; Christopher Fulton, 'The Boy Stripped Bare by His Elders: Art and Adolescence in Renaissance Florence', *Art Journal*, 56, 1997, 31–40; Adrian W.B. Randolph, 'Homosocial Desire and Donatello's Bronze David' in his *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, New Haven, 2002, 139–92.
- 31 On these statuettes, see Ettliger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 131; Leopold D. Ettliger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, London, 1978, 147 nos 16–17; Michael Knuth's entry in Volker Krahn, ed., *Von allen Seiten schön: Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock*, Berlin, 1995, 154–6; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 340–9, 528 nos 66–7.
- 32 Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on representations*, 2nd edn, London, 2002, 38. See also Loraux, 'Herakles', and, on the performance of masculine heroics, Patricia Simons, 'Separating the Men from the Boys: Masculinities in Early Quattrocento Florence and Donatello's Saint George', in F. W. Kent and Charles Zika, eds, *Rituals, Images and Words: Varieties of Cultural Expression in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Turnhout, 2005, 147–76.
- 33 They develop the theme established by Fulgentius in the sixth century (*Fulgentius the mythographer*, 2.4): 'He was born of the earth because lust is conceived of the flesh.' The allegorical position was reiterated in the twelfth century by the Third Vatican Mythographer (*Scriptores rerum mythicarum*, 13.2) and then Boccaccio in the fourteenth (*Genealogia Deorum* 1.13). See also Brumble, *Classical myths and legends*, 26; Ursula Hoff, 'The sources of "Hercules and Antaeus" by Rubens', in Franz Philipp and June Stewart, eds, *In honour of Daryl Lindsay. Essays and studies*, Melbourne, 1964, 68, 74 n. 14; Galinsky, *The Hercules Theme*, 190. Enrique de Villena's *Los doze trabajos de Hércules* (1417) similarly regarded Antaeus as 'la carne', nourished in his carnality by contact with the earth: *Obras completas*, vol. 1, Madrid, 1994, 68–70.
- 34 For a selection of bronze statuettes of Hercules and Antaeus, see Ebert-Schifferer, *Natur und Antike in der Renaissance*, nos. 21–2, 99–100, 308; Krahn, ed., *Von allen Seiten schön*, 173–5, 378–9, nos 18 (Antico), 119 (Giambologna).
- 35 On the seal, first recorded in 1277, see Ullman, *The humanism of Coluccio Salutati*, 24; Ettliger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 120–2 ('Herculea clava domat Florentia prava'); Marlis von Hessert, *Zum Bedeutungswandel der Herkules-Figur in Florenz von den Anfängen der Republik bis zum Prinzipat Cosimos I*, Cologne, 1991, 7–17, 67–9. The translation is from Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 82.
- 36 For the seal by Domenico di Polo, with a mount commissioned by Cosimo I, who succeeded Alessandro as Duke after the assassination in 1537, see Marco Collareta, 'Il sigillo con l'Ercole del Museo degli Argenti', *Rivista d'arte*, 38 (1986), 291–3; Alessandro Cecchi's entry in Annamaria Giusti et al., *Masters of Florence*, Memphis, 2004, 142.

- 37 Dante, *Inferno*, 25.25–33; Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Campanile of Florence Cathedral. 'Giotto's tower'*, New York, 1971, 86, 94–5; Ettlenger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 123; Anita Fiderer Moskowitz, *The sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano*, Cambridge, 1986, 32, 38, 127.
- 38 Maria Monica Donato, 'Hercules and David in the early decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio: Manuscript evidence', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 54, 1991, 83–90 ('... disieci ingrates urbes, sevosque tyrannos/... [Terrarum domitor quondam, nunc voce perenni/per celebrator claros populos; virtutis imago nunc michi persimilis, talem Florentia sedem/exibuit...']). In 1409–10, and thinking of the civic seal, Goro Dati praised his city in analogous terms: 'Ercole fu giogante, che andava spegnendo tutti i tiranni, e inique signorie, e così hanno fatto i Fiorentini' (Donato, 87; Ettlenger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 121; Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio 1298–1532. Government, architecture, and imagery in the civic palace of the Florentine Republic*, Oxford, 1995, 54 n. 84). Rubinstein is confident that the epigram can be dated 1406–17. That Hercules was sometimes thought of as a *giogante* may recall his even more gigantic opponent Antaeus. When drawing a parallel between David's defeat of Goliath and Hercules's victory over Antaeus, Dante associated two conquests of giants: *Monarchia* 2.9.11.
- 39 The carving of the Labours is attributed to Piero di Giovanni Tedesco by Bergstein, *The sculpture of Nanni di Banco*, 86. On the Porta, see also Ettlenger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 124–8; von Hessert, *Zum Bedeutungswandel der Herkules-Figur in Florenz*, 26–44.
- 40 Panofsky, *Renaissance and renaissances*, 150 n. 4; Ettlenger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 126–7. Such is presumably also the case with the two reliefs carved by Antonio Federighi for the Pozzetto del Sabato Santo in Siena's Cathedral a little before 1460, depicting Hercules conquering the Nemean Lion and battling with Nessus: see Alessandro Angelini, 'Antonio Federighi e il mito di Ercole', in *Pio II e le arti. La riscoperta dell'antico da Federighi a Michelangelo*, ed. A. Angelini, Siena, 2005, 105, 122.
- 41 Franco Sacchetti, *Il libro delle rime*, ed. Franca Brambilla Agno, Florence, 1990, 284–90 (no. 197); Donato, 'Hercules and David', 87; Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio*, 54. Before May 1371 Sacchetti also wrote a song specifically against the Visconti of Milan, in which 'Hercole qui resurga/e vinca te sí come vinse Anteo' (149.58–9). Hercules remained meaningful in the civic arena; see n. 67 here for 1472.
- 42 Sacchetti, *Il libro delle rime*, 284–5, 290, lines 4–7, 145–6 ('Hercole novo, libertà gioconda,/figlia di Roma e sov'ogn'altra donna./... tu di fortezza se' oggi colonna;/... tu vuogli ch'ogni turba sia quieta').
- 43 According to most accounts, Antaeus was Libyan and 'black, dyed by exposure to the sun' in Philostratus, *Imagines* 2: 21, trans. Arthur Fairbanks, London, 1931, 227. For Guidoccio Cozzarelli's *Libyan Sibyl*, see Jean Devisse and Michael Mollat, *The Image of the Black in Western art. II. From the Early Christian era to the 'Age of Discovery'*, Part 2: *Africans in the Christian ordinance of the world (Fourteenth to the Sixteenth century)*, trans. William Granger Ryan, Cambridge, MA, 1979, 222, fig. 232.
- 44 Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, vol. 1, 325 (3.27.16: 'Sublato quidem a terra Antheo, hoc est subtracto potu et cibo, unde dantur alimenta libidini, proculdubio moritur Antheus deficiente nutrimento furori'), trans. in Michael A. Jacobsen, 'A note on the iconography of Hercules and Antaeus in Quattrocento Florence', *Source*, 1, Fall 1981, 16. Salutati's chief source (322) is *Fulgentius the mythographer*, 2.4. Lucan, *Civil war* 4.593–4, 596–7, 646 on Tellus is also quoted (321, 325).
- 45 For example, he is 'deprived of his mother's aid' and is 'called the child of earth': Landino, *De vera nobilitate*, 109 ('... eo pactu materno auxilio destitutus... is est filius terrae'), as translated in Albert Rabil, Jr., ed., *Knowledge, goodness, and power: The debate over nobility among Quattrocento Italian humanists*, Binghamton, NY, 1991, 257; Pietro Andrea di Bassi, *The Labors of Hercules*, 68, 70. Machiavelli claimed the *favole poetiche* arose because Hercules defeated the enemy on foreign soil (*Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* 2.12), and his interest in military strategy led him to emphasize Hercules's *astuzia*.
- 46 Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, vol. 1, 322–3: 'Hec etenim corpus effeminans vires extinguit, visum hebetat, nervos solvit, digestivam ledit, agilitatem aufert, et propter resolutionem spirituum ac semen quod emittitur nulla delectatio tanto damno per hominem procurator.' Hercules realizing what his winning stratagem would be is highlighted in Lucan, *Civil war* 4.645–9, quoted by Salutati (321).
- 47 Lucan, *Civil war* 4.624 ('pectore pectus'). Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, 325, cites Lucan's 'pressis intra mea pectora membris' (4.648) (limbs crushed at my chest), and 'iam pectora pigro stricta gelu' (4.652–53), holding the dying Antaeus to his chest.
- 48 Marco Spallanzani and Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà, eds, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Florence, 1992, 26 (the inventory of 1492, describing each canvas as being approx. 3.5 m); Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, Florence, 1906, vol. 3, 293–4 (hereafter Vasari-Milanesi); Ettlenger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 128–9; Ettlenger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, 164–5, no. 44; Wolfger A. Bulst, 'Die sala grande des Palazzo Medici in Florenz: Rekonstruktion und Bedeutung', in Andreas Beyer and Bruce Boucher, eds, *Piero de' Medici, 'il Gottoso' 1416–1469: Kunst im Dienste der Mediceer*, Berlin, 1993, 89–127; Alison Wright, 'Piero de' Medici and the Pollaiuolo' in

- the same volume, 129–49; Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 324–31; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 75–86, 535–6, no. 92.
- 49 For Cosimo I de' Medici's interest in Hercules, see Kurt W. Forster, 'Metaphors of rule: Political ideology and history in the portraits of Cosimo I de' Medici', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 15, 1971, 78–83, 96; Ettliger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 139–41; von Hesser, *Zum Bedeutungswandel der Herkules-Figur in Florenz*, 73–104; Annamaria Giusti in Cristina Acidini Luchinat et al., *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the art of Late Renaissance Florence*, London, 2002, no. 47 (the fountain sculpture of Hercules and Antaeus by Tribolo and Ammanati for the Medici villa at Castello); Deborah Parker, 'The poetry of patronage: Bronzino and the Medici', *Renaissance Studies*, 17, 2003, 233, 236–41.
- 50 Several works representing Hercules and Antaeus were commissioned by the two Medici dukes, from Castello's fountain to a medal inscribed 'The ultimate attempt of Herculean virtue': Carl Brandon Strehlke's entry in Strehlke et al., *Pontormo, Bronzino, and the Medici*, Philadelphia, 2004, 134–5, no. 39. On the seal, see notes 35–6 above; on the snowmen, note 85 below. For the useful reminder that Hercules was long regarded as a model for monarchy, see Donato, 'Hercules and David', 88, note 26. Hercules was a political figure in Venice too, visible on façades and the tombs of Doges: see Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, New Haven, 1996, 21–2, 113, 172 and *passim*.
- 51 Ettliger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, 26–8, 51, 141–2, no. 10; Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 330–1; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 75, 86–7, 519, no. 42.
- 52 Mark Zucker, *The Illustrated Bartsch 25 (commentary) formerly volume 13 (part 2): Early Italian Masters*, New York, 1984, 567; Ettliger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, 27, 165, figs 22–23; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 75. Timothy Wilson, 'Pollaiuolo's lost Hercules and the Lion recorded on maiolica?', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 53, 1990, 299–301 discusses other possible records of the episodes with the Hydra and the Nemean Lion. Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 338–9, figs. 11–12, treats two Florentine manuscripts of 1494 illustrating the exploit with Antaeus, one of which follows Pollaiuolo's painting.
- 53 Spallanzani and Bertelà, *Libro d'inventario*, 26 ('Erhole che schoppia Anteo'). Vasari-Milanesi vol. 3, 294 also uses 'scoppia'. Notably, a delicate semi-transparent veil above the lion's skin indicates that certain viewers would have been disturbed by the degree to which Hercules's buttocks were exposed. That area of Hercules is more completely covered in the statuette.
- 54 Spallanzani and Bertelà, *Libro d'inventario*, 72 ('Uno Erhole che schoppia Anteo, di bronzo tutto'), but valued at only two florins and of a small size); Ettliger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 130; Ettliger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, 27, 51–2, 147 no. 18; Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 331–2; Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, entry in Maria Grazia Vaccari, ed., *Pollaiolo e Verrocchio? Due ritratti fiorentini del Quattrocento*, Florence, 2001, 58–63; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 334–40, 527–8, no. 65.
- 55 Martin Kemp, ed., *Leonardo on painting. An anthology of writings by Leonardo da Vinci with a selection of documents relating to his career as an artist*, trans. M. Kemp and Margaret Walker, London, 1989, 135; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 339. The battle is twice mentioned by Leon Battista Alberti, 'On painting' and 'On sculpture', trans. Cecil Grayson, London, 1972, 51, 125, in the context of proportion and with regard to facial expression.
- 56 For illustrations of this view, rarely photographed, see Ettliger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, fig. 82; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, figs 272–3.
- 57 To choose two books merely for their title, see Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 1996; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation*, London, 1997.
- 58 On the Crespi chronicle, now in Milan, and on the Orsini cycle, see Colvin, *Florentine Picture Chronicle*, 9; Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Corpus der italienischen Zeichnungen 1300–1450*, vols 1–2, Berlin, 1968, 592, and pl. 834 for the *Hercules furens*; Robert Louis Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men cycle of Cardinal Giordano Orsini and the *Uomini Famosi* tradition in Fifteenth-Century Italian art', PhD, University of Michigan, 1970, for this and other partial copies of the lost fresco cycle (for Hercules see 102–103, 106, pls Xib, Xlc, XXIXa, the latter being the Cockerell page copied from the Crespi chronicle showing *Hercules furens*); Luisa Scalabrioni, 'Masolino a Montegiordano: un ciclo perduto di "uomini illustri"', in *Da Pisanello alla nascita dei Musei Capitolini. L'antico a Roma alla vigilia del Rinascimento*, Rome, 1988, 63–6. The scene with Hercules and Antaeus is reproduced in Ettliger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, fig. 21. Also in Rome, Filarete's bronze doors for St Peter's, completed in 1445, included a face-to-face battle between Hercules and Antaeus: Helen Roeder, 'The borders of Filarete's bronze doors to St. Peter's', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 10, 1947, 151, pl. 39 b. As indicated by the useful summary in Wright, 'Piero de' Medici and the Pollaiuolo', 141, Hercules often appeared in Famous Men cycles.
- 59 See Colvin, *Florentine Picture Chronicle* (facsimile); Degenhart and Schmitt, *Corpus der italienischen Zeichnungen*, 573–621 nos 566–620, and vols 1–4, pls 385–439a (*Hercules and Antaeus* is no. 585); Lucy Whitaker, 'Maso Finiguerra, Baccio Baldini and *The Florentine Picture Chronicle*', in Elizabeth Cropper, ed., *Florentine drawing at the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Papers from a colloquium held at the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1992*, Bologna,

- 1994, 181–96; Albert Jan Elen, *Italian Late-Medieval and Renaissance drawing-books from Giovanni de' Grassi to Palma Giovane: a codicological approach*, Leiden, 1995, 98–9, 242–7, with further bibliography.
- 60 Whitaker, 'Maso Finiguerra, Baccio Baldini and *The Florentine Picture Chronicle*', 186 believes that the use of pattern books 'suggests that other figures were copied from similar sources'. Other than Colvin, *Florentine Picture Chronicle*, pl. 35 and Jacobsen, 'A note on the iconography', 18, the Antaeus scene is rarely discussed or reproduced, and its erotic element has not attracted comment.
- 61 Also moving away from an earlier tradition of face-to-face encounter, Michelangelo's drawings of the mightier figure, Jupiter (in the form of an imperial eagle), situated behind his *patiens* idol young Ganymede used a similar composition to convey erotic intimacy. For the drawings, and the popularity of the design, recalled in numerous prints, paintings, cameos and other objects, see Saslow, *Ganymede*, chap. 1; Marcella Marongiu, ed., *Il mito di Ganimede prima e dopo Michelangelo*, Florence, 2002, 66–107.
- Certain aspects of the Florentine drawing do occur in a Spanish illustration published in Zamora in 1483 (and reissued from Burgos in 1499), heading chap. 9 of Enrique de Villena's *Los doze trabajos de Hércules*. It features a cave on the right and has Hercules and Antaeus locked in an embrace that appears to be sexual. The giant lies on top of Hercules, his legs between those of the hero and his buttocks exposed, as though he is engaged in sexual intercourse with a female partner. The 1499 edition contains new images, and keeps a similar arrangement for the Antaeus scene, although the sexual implications are much reduced, perhaps deliberately, because the composition has been turned 90 degrees as it were and now Hercules stands, barely, while he struggles intimately with the giant. See de Villena, *Obras completas*, 66, 69, for both illustrations. On the illustration of 1483, Bull, *The mirror of the gods*, 106, notes that 'Antaeus's tongue sticks out provocatively', though this indicates that he is being strangled.
- 62 Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 12–13, 51–2, 69, 72, 98, 105–111, 214–15.
- 63 Cristoforo Landino, *De vera nobilitate*, ed. Maria Teresa Liaci, Florence, 1970, 107–110 (for the *terminus post quem* of 1487 see 16–17); Ettliger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 136; Jacobsen, 'A note on the iconography', 17. *Fulgentius the mythographer*, 2.4 has, for instance, 'when virtue bears aloft the whole mind and denies it the sight of the flesh, it at once emerges victorious.'
- 64 Landino, *De vera nobilitate*, 107 ('est profecto invictissimus omnium mortalium dux Hercules imitandus'); translated in Rabil, Jr., *Knowledge, goodness, and power*, 256.
- 65 Landino, *De vera nobilitate*, 109 ('Anteum eum appetitum dicimus, qui rationi adversatur. . . semper adversatur rationi appetites irrationalis; is est filius terrae, quia illum in nobis corpus resque terranae et corruptibiles excitant. Quapropter non potest Hercules, idest vir sapiens, illum extinguere, si terrae haereat, idest dum terrena caducaque cupimus; sed si in altum et ad divina elevetur, tunc illarum amore raptis animis nostris funditus perit omnis terrenarum rerum libido'); translated in Rabil, Jr., *Knowledge, goodness, and power*, 257. Landino is echoing Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, 322 (3.27.8).
- 66 Landino, *De vera nobilitate*, 110 ('. . . immortalisque effectus ad summam veramque nobilitatem perducitur quam quidem nullus omnino hominum, nisi omnium civilium heroicarumque virtutum via . . .'); translated in Rabil, Jr., *Knowledge, goodness, and power*, 258.
- 67 Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, ed. Peter Lohe, Florence, 1980, 32: 'At non sibi sapiens, verum sua sapientia omnibus paene mortalibus profuit. Nam maximam orbis partem peragrans horrendas feras sustulit, perniciosam ac inmania monstra perdomuit, crudelissimos tyrannos coercuit, plurimis populis ac nationibus ius libertatemque restituit'. I use the translation in Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 328 (who notes the relationship between the labours described and the Medici paintings). 'The defeat of tyrants, the freeing of subject nations, the restitution of liberty – all credited to Hercules – are characteristic *topoi* of Florentine republicanism': Ettliger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 137. Landino's treatise (dated between April and December of 1472 by Lohe, xxxii) is dedicated to Federigo da Montefeltro, the mercenary captain whose suppression of revolt in Volterra in mid-June 1472 earned the gratitude of the Florentine Signoria. By 24 July 1472 Antonio Pollaiuolo was at work on a silver helmet as a gift for Federigo from the Signoria, decorated with the image of Hercules trampling the Volterranean griffin: Ettliger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, 168; Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 295–6, 344, 534, no. 88. Landino's specific passage about Hercules occurs immediately after Federigo had been praised for his virtue, literary study and military skill. Whichever came first, text or helmet, the connection between Federigo and Hercules was in the air.
- 68 Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia*, Turin, 1959, vol. 1, part 2, 775 ('Ratio rursus in nobis Hercules nominatur. Hic occidit Anteum, id est, immania quaedam simulacra phantasiae. Quando videlicet a terra attollit in altum, hoc est, quando a sensibus & corporali imaginatione se moverit. Hic quoque leonem domat, id est, iracundiam cohibet. Hic hydram obruncat . . . id est, concupiscendi uim amputat'); *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, 1981, vol. 3, 61; Ettliger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 137; Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 329. On Ficino's interpretation of Hercules, see Michael J.

- Allen, 'Homo ad zodiacum: Marsilio Ficino and the Boethian Hercules' in Dennis J. Dutschke et al., eds, *Forma e parola: Studi in memoria di Fredi Chiappelli*, Rome, 1992, 205–221.
- 69 John Pope-Hennessy, *Catalogue of Italian sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, 1964, vol. 1, 323–4, vol. 3, fig. 349. Around 1524, Rosso stressed the Hydra's femininity by providing a frontal view of her genitals: Eugene A. Carroll, *Rosso Fiorentino. Drawings, prints, and decorative arts*, Washington DC, 1987, no. 11. Chaotic and endlessly fertile, sprouting two new heads whenever one was cut off, the Hydra fascinated Ficino, whose letter of 1477 devoted most space to this 'insatiable whirlpool' of passion ('insatiabili voragine'): Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 775.
- 70 Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 748 ('Equidem si mihi daretur optio, Hercules esse mallet quam Sardanapalus. Quot alter monstra praemebat, tot alter monstris opprimebatur, alter superatis feris Deus evasit, alter superatus a feris, factus est fera deterior atque miserior'); Marsilio Ficino, *Letters*, trans. Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, 1978, vol. 2, 77. Juvenal similarly opposed Hercules and Sardanapalus: *Satires* 10: 3601–3662.
- 71 For example, Aristotle, *Generation of animals* 728a17–22, 729a10–11, 729b10–20, 737a25–30, 738b20–30; Baldesar Castiglione, *The book of the courtier. The Singleton translation*, ed. Daniel Javitch, London, 2002, 156–8 (3.11–12, 15).
- 72 Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, 193 (3.9.5: 'gloria litis'); Galinsky, *The Herakles theme*, 197.
- 73 For Ficino's comment in a dedication letter addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici in 1491, see Michael J. B. Allen, ed. and trans., *Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, 482–3.
- 74 Ronald Lightbown, *Mantegna*, Oxford, 1986, 112.
- 75 The earlier statuette is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the later one in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. On the former, see Anthony Radcliffe's entry in David Chambers and Jane Martineau, eds, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, London, 1981, no. 55. For the latter, see Ebert-Schifferer, *Natur und Antike in der Renaissance*, no. 22; Leithe-Jasper, *Renaissance master bronzes from the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna*, no. 9; Manfred Leithe-Jasper's entry in Krahn, ed., *Von allen Seiten schön*, 173–5, no. 18. The antique marble fragment, installed in the Belvedere around 1503, is now restored and in the Palazzo Pitti: Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the antique. The lure of classical sculpture 1500–1900*, London, 1982, no. 47; Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance artists and antique sculpture*, no. 137.
- 76 For Mantegna's painting, and prints associated with his designs, see Amalia Mezzetti, 'Un "Ercole e Anteo" del Mantegna', *Bollettino d'arte*, 43, 1958, 232–44; Jay A. Levenson, Konrad Oberhuber and Jacquelyn L. Sheehan, *Early Italian engravings from the National Gallery of Art*, Washington DC, 1973, 218–21, 238–9; Zucker, *The Illustrated Bartsch 25 (commentary)*, 118–22; Lightbown, *Mantegna*, 101, 112, 416, 483, no. 183, 492, no. 219; Jane Martineau, ed., *Andrea Mantegna*, London, 1992, 297–318 (listing six compositions of *Hercules and Antaeus* by, or after, Mantegna).
- 77 See Tina Matarrese, 'Il mito di Ercole a Ferrara nel Quattrocento tra letteratura e arti figurative', in Patrizia Castelli, ed., *L'ideale classico a Ferrara e in Italia nel Rinascimento*, Florence, 1998, 191–202; Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600*, Baltimore, 1989, 289–99.
- 78 See Mark Zucker, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch 24 formerly volume 13 (Part 1). Early Italian Masters*, New York, 1980, 76–7; Mark Zucker, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch 25, formerly volume 13 (Part 2). Early Italian Masters*, New York, 1980, 9, 50–1, 183–6, 296, 302–303; Zucker, *The Illustrated Bartsch 25 (commentary)*, 161–2 (Nicoletto da Modena), 338–40 (Giovanni Antonio da Brescia), 574. Watermark evidence indicates that at least three plates were taken to France: Martineau, *Andrea Mantegna*, 313, 473–5. Hercules lifting Antaeus is the subject of two North Italian drawings of the 1460s or 1470s: Lillian Armstrong, 'A North Italian Drawing of Hercules and Antaeus in a German Incunabula: Marco Zoppo (?) and Drawings in Renaissance Books', in Susan L'Engle and Gerald B. Guest, eds, *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, Art and Architecture*, London, 2006, 5–20. For a drawing attributed to Signorelli and dated c. 1490, see A. W. Popham and J. Wilde, *The Italian drawings of the XV and XVI centuries in the collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle*, London, 1949, no. 29 and pl. 12. For plaquettes of Hercules and Antaeus, one by Moderno c. 1488, see Francesco Rossi, ed., *Placchette e rilievi di bronzo nell'età del Mantegna*, Milan, 2006, 51–2, no. 27, 64, no. 44.
- Not considered here, although they attest further to the theme's popularity, are prints of Hercules and Antaeus associated with Marcan-tonio Raimondi and his circle, dated to the early sixteenth century and produced in Bologna or Rome.
- 79 Hans Baldung Grien's drawing of c. 1530 shows the pair grappling as virtual equals in size, meeting frontally at the waist and hence having their genitals in direct contact: James H. Marrow and Alan Shestack, *Hans Baldung Grien: Prints and drawings*, Washington DC, 1981, no. 78. Joseph Leo Koerner, *The moment of self-portraiture in German Renaissance art*, Chicago, 1993, 441, 443, points out that Hercules's face appears to be a self-portrait, as it is in a subsequent painting, and that overpainting has obfuscated the degree to which the conquest is explicitly aimed at Antaeus's genitals.
- Renaissance artists were adept at representing genitals by way of visual puns. In the case of a drawing by Jacopo da Bologna, which pictures the front-to-front encounter, Hercules's genitals

- are seemingly restrained by the lion's skin wrapped around his waist, but the visible result is that the lion's paw hanging at the end of the cloak somewhat resembles a tumescent penis: Faietti and Oberhuber, *Bologna e l'umanesimo 1490-1510*, 232 and fig. 12. The hanging lion's paw, in a similar location in Pollaiuolo's painting of *Hercules and the Hydra*, takes on a semblance to manly testicles (Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, pl. 56), even more exaggerated in an engraving after Baccio Baldini (Mark J. Zucker, *The Illustrated Bartsch 24 commentary part 2. Early Italian Masters*, New York, 1994, 181-2).
- 80 On the inscription, see Suzanne Boorsch, in Martineau, *Andrea Mantegna*, no. 86. Although the phrase may initially have praised Ercole I d'Este, it recurs on many variants and therefore probably came to have more generic significance, adding to the pseudo-classical air of the image.
- 81 Antonio Cornazzano, *Vita di Bartolomeo Colleoni*, trans. and ed. Giuliana Crevatin, Rome, 1990, 8-9; Joanne G. Bernstein, 'Bartolommeo Colleoni as Hercules Invictus: Guidizani's medal reinterpreted', in Marco Rossi and Alessandro Rovetta, eds, *Studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Maria Luisa Gatti Perer*, Milano, 1999, 119-29.
- 82 Pietro Aretino, *Ragionamento. Dialogo*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, Milan, 1984, 28. He is also disparaging about 'Bartolomeo Cogliani' in the *Cortigiana*, a comedy he wrote in Rome in 1524-25, and in a letter of 25 June 1537: *Cortigiana. Opera nova. Pronostico. Il testamento dell'elefante. Farza*, ed. Angelo Romano, Milan, 1989, 126 (4.1); *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, vol. 1, Rome, 1997, 230. The 'K of the alphabet who was a man of arms' is probably another reference: *Il marescacio* 3.11. On Colleoni and the monument, see Andrew Butterfield, *The sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio*, London, 1997, 158-83, 232-6.
- 83 Gianmario Petró, 'Stemmi colleoneschi a Bergamo e nel territorio. Per una Geografia delle presenze' in Lelio Pagani, ed., *Bartolomeo Colleoni e il territorio bergamasco. Problemi e prospettive*, Bergamo, 2000, 13-35. I am grateful to Timothy McCall for bringing this article to my attention.
- 84 Saslow, *Ganymede*, 32 and n. 37, which notes that in 1561 Michelangelo thanked Leone Leoni for his portrait medal of Michelangelo by giving him a wax statuette of *Hercules and Antaeus*. For the marble *Hercules* of c. 1492-94, later sent to Francis I, see Ascanio Condivi, *The life of Michelangelo*, trans. Alice Sedgwick Wohl, ed. Hellmut Wohl, Oxford, 1976, 15, 126 n. 20; Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 7, 145, 341; Ettlinger, 'Hercules Florentinus', 119, 137-8; Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 333-4; Janet Cox-Rearick, *The collection of Francis I: Royal treasures*, Antwerp, 1995, no. IX-5. Michelangelo's treatment of the standing Hercules theme is discussed in Paul Joannides, 'Michelangelo and the Medici Garden', in *La Toscana al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico. Politica Economia Cultura Arte*, Pisa, 1996, 23, 30-3.
- 85 For 1494, see Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 15; Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 7, 145, 341; Luca Landucci, *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516*, rpt. Florence, 1969, 66-7. On the Florentine tradition of Herculean snowmen, see Alison Brown, 'City and citizen: Changing perceptions in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries' in Anthony Molho et al., eds, *City-States in classical antiquity and Medieval Italy*, Ann Arbor, 1991, 95 and n. 11, including Bartolommeo del Corazza's report in January 1409. Pontormo's visit to see a Hercules ('a vedere uno Hercole') in March 1556, not long after a noteworthy snowfall, was probably about such a spectacle: Jacopo da Pontormo, *Diario*, Florence, 1956, 69-70.
- 86 Virginia L. Bush, 'Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus* and Florentine traditions' in Henry A. Millon, ed., *Studies in Italian art and architecture 15th through 18th centuries*, Cambridge, MA, 1980, 163-89; Wright, 'The myth of Hercules', 336; Michael Hirst, 'Michelangelo in Florence: "David" in 1503 and "Hercules" in 1506', *Burlington Magazine*, 142, 2000, 487-92, esp. 492; Paul Joannides, 'Two drawings related to Michelangelo's *Hercules and Antaeus*', *Master Drawings*, 41, 2003, 105-118. Around 1506-8, Leonardo da Vinci was also contemplating the production of a sculpture of Hercules: Carmen C. Bambach, 'A Leonardo drawing for the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Studies for a statue of Hercules', *Apollo*, 153, March 2001, 16-23.
- 87 For the drawing in the British Museum, dated around July 1525 by de Tolnay, see Charles de Tolnay, *Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo*, Novara, 1976, vol. 2, no. 236 recto, with earlier bibliography. For the drawing in the Ashmolean, dated to 1525-28, see de Tolnay, *Corpus*, no. 237 recto, with earlier bibliography; Jacobsen, 'A note on the iconography', 18 and fig. 3; Paul Joannides, *The Drawings of Michelangelo and His Followers in the Ashmolean Museum*, Cambridge, 2007, 166-74, no. 30 (dating both drawings to 1524-25).
- 88 Hoff, 'The sources of "Hercules and Antaeus"', 70; the relationship to the *Laocoön*, and the pathos of Michelangelo's sketch is also emphasized in Cropper, *Pontormo: Portrait of a halberdier*, 70-5 *passim*.
- 89 de Tolnay, *Corpus*, no. 237 verso; *The poetry of Michelangelo*, trans. James M. Saslow, London, 1991, no. 51 (with parallel Italian), here quoted with some translation preferred from *Complete poems and selected letters of Michelangelo*, trans. Creighton Gilbert, New York, 1970, 30-1: 'Le fallace speranze e 'l van desio,/piangendo, amando, ardendo e sospirando/... m'hanno tenuto, ... lontan certo dal vero. ... /Or che 'l tempo la scorza cangia e muda,/la morte e l'alma insieme ognor fan prouoe,/la prima e la seconda, del mie stato'. The verso includes two ideal male heads attributed to Michelangelo by de Tolnay, while assistants sketched a nearby skull and other items like an equestrian warrior, a giraffe, and a naked man holding his legs in the air so

- that his testicles are clearly displayed. Thoughts of death, ambitions about grand artistic subjects, and records of unusual animal life, mingle in the studio's imagination and pastimes with erotic *scherzi*. The very incidental nature of the various elements suggests that the everyday life and graphic fantasies of Michelangelo's companions readily encompassed sexualized, masculine encounters.
- 90 For the Windsor drawing, see Popham and Wilde, *The Italian drawings of the XV and XVI centuries in the collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle*, no. 423, pl. 19; de Tolnay, *Corpus*, no. 335 recto; Michael Hirst, *Michelangelo and his drawings*, London, 1988, 110–11 and col. pl. 5; Paul Joannides, *Michelangelo and his influence. Drawings from Windsor Castle*, Washington DC, 1996, 80–1.
- 91 The pose recalls the description in a Greek epigram of Antaeus 'doubled up' or 'bent double': *The Greek Anthology* 16.97, discussed, without reference to Michelangelo, in Wright, *The Pollaiuolo brothers*, 337.
- 92 de Tolnay, *Corpus*, nos 267 recto-verso; *Roman drawings of the Sixteenth century from the Musée du Louvre*, Paris, Chicago, 1979, no. 29; Saslow, *The poetry of Michelangelo*, nos 31 and A 27 ('... tante amor più quante più grazia truovo./... O nuovo e stran tormento!'). Since all four feet are on the ground, the group may represent the struggle of Jacob with the Angel. de Tolnay situated the drawing in the time of Cavalieri and suggests an 'allusione autobiografica' to relations between the two men, a point affirmed by the verse.
- 93 Hoff, 'Sources of "Hercules and Antaeus"', 69–70.
- 94 Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 513.
- 95 For example, J. N. Adams, *The Latin sexual vocabulary*, Baltimore, 1982, 159; Aretino, *I modi* 1.6, 1.14, 3.5, 7.17, 13.14. 16.17; Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* 28.17.3–4; Secundus, *Elegies* 1.5.9–11, 2.6 and *Basium* 16; Veronica Franco, *Poems and selected letters*, ed. and trans. Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal, Chicago, 1998, 137 (13.85); Pierre de Ronsard, *Sonnets pour Hélène*, quoted in Keith Cameron, *Louise Labé. Renaissance poet and feminist*, Oxford, 1990, 74–75; Gordon Williams, *A glossary of Shakespeare's sexual language*, London, 1997, 93 (death), 98 (die).
- 96 Aretino, *Marfisa* (1.89) and *Ragionamento*, 30 ('facea quell viso arcigno che a Belvedere fa quella figura di marmo ai serpi che l'assassinano in mezzo dei suoi figli'); translation from *Aretino's dialogues*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, New York, 1971, 29.
- 97 Cristelle L. Baskins, 'Cassone' painting, humanism, and gender in Early Modern Italy, Cambridge, 1998, 40. In the second century CE, the Greek oneirocritic Artemidorus reported that 'a woman dreamt that she had performed the labours of Heracles': Artemidorus, *The interpretation of dreams*, trans Robert J. White, Park Ridge, 1975, 202 (4.43). Rare and ancient though this record may be, it suggests that at least some women living under extreme forms of patriarchy were nevertheless able to identify with masculine adventure, albeit in a manner that indicated to authorized interpreters that something was out of joint.
- 98 Christine de Pizan, *Epistre Othea*, ed. Gabriella Parussa, Geneva, 1999, 205: 'Si ne t'est mie necessaire,/Pour armes pourchacier et faire,/ Aler combatre aux fiers serpens./... N'aussi aux autres serpentines.' The following quotations are from 204–206: 'constance et fermeté,' 'roide contre les charneulx desirs' and 'Vers Hercules te faut virer/Et ses vaillances remirer.' The translation is from *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector*, trans. Jane Chance, Newburyport, MA, 1990, 39–41.