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). 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. 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.’ 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
from local cults . . . [he] achieved his full heroic status only after death, when he was honored as if he were a god'.

Hercules was of this category, a mortal apotheosized upon death, sired by the highest divinity, Jupiter, but of a human mother, Alcmene. True to his mixed parentage, the demigod’s mythic saga represents him engaging in both flawed and ideal behaviours. Renaissance authors, artists and viewers grappled with that complexity, experimenting with the multivalent connotations of masculinity put to the test.
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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 ephebe or adult man of glorious bodily beauty and alertness (see plate 2). 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. 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. 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’. 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.

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.’ 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. 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’. 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. 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 Herculeses 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. 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.’
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. 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. 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’. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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
in two dimensions is tangibly accentuated in the case of numerous bronze statuettes.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{36} For the Cathedral’s bell tower, Andrea Pisano carved a relief of \textit{Hercules and Cacus} around 1335, celebrating, as did Dante Alighieri’s \textit{Inferno}, the determined eradication of monsters and enactment of justice against a thief.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.’\textsuperscript{38} Hercules’s civic significance as an exemplar of conquest and masculine virtue was further highlighted, but in the register of \textit{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).\textsuperscript{39} As Panofsky and Leopold Ettlinger have argued, these religious citations of Hercules present his labours as \textit{exempla virtutis}, as ‘mythological antetypes in a Christian context’ of moral allegory.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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. 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. 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’. 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...
'his mother’s nourishment' (Metamorphoses 9.184). Later writers continued to stress his feminine dependency, making the giant infantile and weak.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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. Ettlinger 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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{48} Choosing the same three exploits featured on the Porta della Madorla, the Medici cycle was doubtless a component of their clever appropriation of Florentine civic rhetoric.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{51} Various images, including two engravings by Cristofano Robetta at the end of the century, are also related to the influential Medici cycle.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.
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). 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. Thrashing limbs, tensed muscles, arched backs, at least

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 suppos-
edly 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
frescos 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
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.\textsuperscript{60} Hercules is placed behind his opponent but in a more equal embrace, resulting in heads and knees being on roughly the same level.\textsuperscript{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 ephetic, 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. 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 sodomatically 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. But Landino's frame attends to civic ideals. Hercules is introduced as 'the most invincible leader of all mortals, who surely must be imitated'. 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.' 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’. 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’. 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. 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.

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). 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
ongoing interest in chivalric tales, one catered to by the production of such stories for schoolboys as well as older readers.\(^7\)

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 Raphaelian circle, including Marcantonio Raimondi (plates 7 and 8).\(^8\) 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.\(^9\) Mantegna’s fresco almost covers Hercules’s genitals behind the back of Antaeus’s lower thigh and

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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. 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. 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 Coglioni’. More than once, Aretino played on the general’s name, turning Colleoni into the like-sounding cognoni (testicles), a satire invited by the coat of arms that indeed displayed testicles. 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 excitaments 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. 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.
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

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. 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. 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

confronted with the source of lust. 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.’ 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

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

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’.\(^9\) 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.\(^9\) 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 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’.\(^9\) 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.’\(^9\) 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 uncontested 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.'

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. 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


4 Norman Austin, *Meaning and being in myth*, University Park, PA, 1990, 110.


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 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 associative with the Medici’ and that not all have political messages. The same could be said for the fifteenth century.


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 graffito 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 associative with the Medici’ and that not all have political messages. The same could be said for the fifteenth century.


In the case of Dominique Fernandez, a hidden
Erwin Panofsky, Renaissance and renascences in &
Silvae
Jeremy Warren, 'Bronzes in the Wernher Collection'
about the confrontation.' Wright, that 'there is often something weirdly sexual

non sarebbe atta figura, ne´ apropriata a lui';
petto Anteo, che non paresse che durasse fatica
aiutare Attalante, e quando ancora e' tenne sul
. . . Ben sai che quando e' sostiene il cielo per
Architettura
contemporary sources.'

is not registered – nor was it likely to be – in
erotic charge, though this aspect of his potency
ettes 'could even lend Hercules an implicitly
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brothers

The mirror of the gods
Bull,
Renaissance life and culture': J. R. Hale,
added jolt from the homo-erotic element in
with Antaeus, suggesting there might be 'an
which Hercules is represented in close union
with Hercules's worldwide battles with
monstri] e dal bello Hyla e` vinto.' In using the
santo amore Ercole cede/che vinse il mondo [or: i

For a selection of bronze statuettes of the
standing Hercules, see Wendy Stedman Sheard,

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.'

For Hercules and especially his labours, see Apollolordorus, Biblioteca 2.4.8–7:5; James Hall, Dictionary of subjects and symbols in art, revised edn, New York, 1979, 147–53; Dieter Blume, ‘Hercules or die Ambivalenz des Heros’ in Ebert-Schifferer, 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, 1300–1990, 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 Apollolordorus, Biblioteca 2.5.11; Diodorus Siculus, Biblioteca 4.17.4–5; Philostratus, Imagines 2.21; Lucan, Civil war 4.589–653; Ovid, Metamorphoses, 9.184; Pindar, Isthmian odes 4.52–53; 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.


Salutati, De laboribus Herculis, vol. 2, 634: ‘ad arduum illum virtutum ascensum, si non cedere sed pugnare’.

Lucian, I dialoghi piacevoli, le vere narrationi, le facete epistole di Luciano philosofo, 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.


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 (noble 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 cosi mirabil cosa’). Autobiography, trans. George Bull, Harmondsworth, 1956, 338 (2.71).


33 They develop the theme established by Fulgen-
tius in the sixth century (Fulgentius the mytho-
grapher, 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 doce trabajos de Hércules (1417) similarly regarded Antaeus as ‘la carne’, nourished in his carnality by contact with the earth: Obras completas, vol. I, Madrid, 1994, 68–70.


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 Collaretta, ‘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.

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 (’... disici ingratae urbes, sevosique tirannos... / Terrarum domitor quondam, nunc voce perenni per celebror 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: 'Ercule fu gigante, che andava spegnendo tutti i tiranni, e inique signorie, e cosi hanno fatto i Florentini' (Donato, 87; Ettlinger, '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 gigante 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 Ettlinger, '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 and the mito di Ercole', in *Pio II e le arti. La riscoperta dell'antico da Federighi a Michelangelo*, ed. A. Angelini, Siena, 2005, 105, 122.

40 Panofsky, *Renaissance and renaissances*, 150 n. 4; Ettlinger, '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 and the 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 Ageno, 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 'Hercule qui resurgo' evoca se si 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 ('Hercule novo, liberta gioconda,/figlia di Roma e sov’ogn’altra donna./... tu di fortaleza se’ oggi colonna/... tu vuogli ch’ogni turba sia quieta').


44 Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, vol. 1, 325 (3.27.16): ‘Sublato quidem a terra Antheo, hoc est subtraxto 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 Quattrocentro Florence’, *Source*, 1, Fall 1981, 16. Salutati’s chief source (322) is *Fulgensit 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 flius 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 effeminnatis vires extinguit, visum hebetat, nervos solvit, digestivam ledit, agilitatem aurfet, 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.


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, 21–13, 172 and passim.

51 Ettlinger, 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.


53 Spallanzani and Bertelà, Libro d’inventario, 26 (‘Ercole 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.


56 For illustrations of this view, rarely photographed, see Ettlinger, Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo, fig. 82; Wright, The Pollaiuolo brothers, figs 272–3.


58 On the Crespi chronicle, now in Milan, and on the Orsini cycle, see Colvin, Florentine Picture Chronicle, 9; Bernhard Degenhart and Annegret 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 X1b, Xic, XXIXa, the latter being the Cockerell page copied from the Crespi chronicle showing Hercules furens); Luisa Scalabroni, ‘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 Ettlinger, 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.

Also moving away from an earlier tradition of face-to-face encounter, Michelangelo’s drawings and its erotic element has not attracted comment.

Also moving away from an earlier tradition of imperial eagle), situated behind his face-to-face encounter, Michelangelo's drawings and its erotic element has not attracted comment.

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 Heracles. It features a cave on the right and has Heracles and Antaeus locked in an embrace that appears to be sexual. The giant lies on top of Heracles, 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 Heracles 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.

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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.


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.


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 Shetack, 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 Pollaiuolo’s design, sometimes attributed to Baccio Baldini (Mark J. Zucker, The Illustrated Bartsch 24 commentary part 2. Early Italian Masters, New York, 1994, 181–2).

On the inscription, see Suzanne Boorsch, in his portrait medal of Michelangelo by giving him in 1561 Michelangelo thanked Leone Leoni for McCall for bringing this article to my attention. Bergamo, 2000, 13–35. I am grateful to Timothy

3.11. On Colleoni and the monument, see Andrew Butterfield, 232. The ‘K of the alphabet who was a man of


Gianmario Petró, ‘Stemmi colonechi a Ragionamento. Dialogo Vita di Bartolomeo Colleoni

80 In 1512, see 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).

For 1494, see Condovii, 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 Corazzà’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, 1556, 69–70.


88 Hoff, ‘The sources of “Hercules and Antaeus”’, 70; the relationship to the Lassoom, and the pathos of Michelangelo’s sketch is also emphasized in Cropper, Pontormo: Portrait of a halberdier’, 70–5 passim.

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, ardoio e sospirando/… m’hanno tenuto, … lontan certo dal vero, … , il tempo la scorza cangia e muda,/la morte e l’anima insieme ognor fan pruove,/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 piu` quante piu` 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.


96 Aretino, Marfisa (1.89) and Ragiamento, 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 oneirocric 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.