The Exemplary Hercules from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and Beyond

Edited by

Valerie Mainz
Emma Stafford
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Monstrous Masculinity? Hendrick Goltzius’ 1589 Engraving of The Great Hercules

Joanna Woodall

Amphitryoniadæ virtus terraque marique
Quem latet? Et tanti saevanoverca mali?
Ille tot expositus monstris, Hydæaque, tricorpor
Geryon atque tibi, flammivomque Caco.
Ille hic Antæum, et superatte Achelœ bicornem;
Naiades at truncum fruge ferace beant.

Has anyone not noticed the virtue of the son of Amphitryon [Hercules], on land and sea? And the great evil of his cruel stepmother [Hera/Juno]? He who was exposed to so many monsters, the hydra, and you, three bodied Geryon, and fiery Cacus. Here he overcomes Antaeus and you, two-horned Achelous. But the Naiads enrich the stump with prolific fruits.¹

This is the legend engraved beneath the image of The Great Hercules, the focus of this chapter (Figure 7.1). Signed and dated HGoltzius Invent. et sculpt. A° 1589 (‘H. Goltzius conceived and engraved this in the year 1589’), it is a huge print, made from a single copper plate measuring 562 mm by 495 mm. A massive, excessively muscled figure towers over the landscape, dwarfing the mountains in the distance. The mushrooming muscles, which far exceed the bounds of anatomical accuracy, have earned the figure the humorous Dutch nicknames of de Appel-sak (‘the apple-sack’) or de knollenman (‘the bulbous/tuberous man’).² The enormous club shares the tumescence of the body, but here circular wounds, presumably made as a result of pruning the wood, boil through the knobbly surface. Like the creatures that fought Hercules, Goltzius’ great image is a monster, not only because of its gigantic size but also because it transcends the boundaries of normality, provoking wonder and horror.³

¹ The translation of the inscription is adapted from that provided in the catalogue entry for The Great Hercules in Orenstein 2003–2004, 106–108 (with further bibliography).
² See Leesberg 2012, 1257–261 (156) and the excessive musculature noted by Holman 1993, 396–412 and 399–400; Goeree 1682, 406. I am grateful to Alice Zamboni for this reference.
MONSTROUS MASCULINITY?

Figure 7.1 Hendrick Goltzius, *The Great Hercules*. Engraving 562 mm by 435 mm. Inscribed *HGoltzius Invent. et sculpt. A° 1589*. Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio. Gift of The Print Club of Cleveland (Inv. 1995.38)

Photo released into the public domain in 2019 through the Cleveland Museum of Art’s Open Access Policy
Art historians, including myself, have also struggled with this immense figure. We have fought, using the firm and respectable methodological weapons of contextualisation, iconography and authorial intention, to contain and stabilise it as a representation of a single, coherent subject. Yet as we attempt to do so, further variations and new possibilities arise. This is particularly disconcerting because, as the inscription indicates, the figure of Hercules is supposed to be the epitome of masculine virtue, an embodiment and elevated exemplar of heroic mental and physical strength and endeavour. This chapter follows the story of my engagement with this form of masculine subjectivity, my attempt to pin it down and contain it, and ultimately my recognition that its potency and tragedy lie in its own never-ending, at times deceitful and ridiculous, effort to encompass and conquer everything. As such, I recognise *The Great Hercules* as a proto-modern figure appropriate to the European expansion of trade and knowledge across the globe at end of the sixteenth century: the beginning of empire. On the way to this conclusion, I contend with Hercules as an avatar for the character and ambitions of its artist, Hendrick Goltzius, and as a body politic – a quasi-allegorical personification of the city of Haarlem, both as a place with a distinctive identity and history and as a microcosm for the Netherlands as a whole.

In the first section I shall contemplate the print in the light of the knowledge to which contemporary art lovers would have had access and which can be shown to be relevant to its interpretation. This produces an ever-expanding, ever-mutating *Great Hercules* that demands to be tackled in ingenious ways. The second section will attempt this by mobilising the concepts of *aporia* and virtue.

### 1.1 Haarlem/Hendrick/Hercules

The print was published in Haarlem, in the Dutch province of Holland, during a period known as ‘the Troubles’.⁴ A significant understatement, ‘the Troubles’ referred to a profound breakdown of political and religious authority in the seventeen provinces of the Netherlands, whose Catholic overlord was the Habsburg sovereign, Philip II of Spain (1527–1598). There was an initial wave of Protestant iconoclasm in 1566, in which devotional images and other manifestations of power were attacked, defaced and removed. Over the subsequent

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⁴ The name derives from the *Conseil des Troubles*, a repressive commission set up in 1567 by the Habsburg governor, Don Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, third Duke of Alva (1507–1582), to investigate and punish the rebels. See further Israel 1995, 156–161.
decades many living human bodies experienced oppression, cruelty and suffering caused by violent civil war and repeated attempts to reassert political control. The print was published ten years after the Union of Utrecht, in which the seven rebel Northern provinces pledged their alliance and laid the foundations of a new, independent polity. Although known as the United Provinces of the Netherlands, sovereignty in this emergent state was in fact divided, negotiated and configured by the surviving institutions of the old, dynastic regime.

Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), the maker of The Great Hercules, was no run-of-the-mill artisan in a provincial town. He was a highly successful and ambitious artist and publisher, a self-conscious successor to Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), in the most ancient city in the Netherlands, a centre of culture and manufacture that claimed printing as its own invention. Having been taught the art of engraving by the distinguished writer, philosopher, translator, politician and liberal theologian Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert (1522–1590), Goltzius was in touch with intellectuals and political figures. He also collaborated with Bartolomeus Spranger (1546–1611), a leading artist at the renowned, cosmopolitan Imperial Habsburg court in Prague. Goltzius knew Spranger’s work through the agency of his close friend in Haarlem, the painter, poet and writer on art Karel Van Mander (1548–1606). In 1604 Van Mander was to publish Het Schilder-Boeck (The Painter Book), a hugely influential compendium of art literature that is key to my interpretation of The Great Hercules. Based in part upon Vasari’s Lives, but much more than just a translation, the book included a long biography of Goltzius, and an extensive account of Hercules’ trials and escapades within a commentary on Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Het Schilder-Boeck offered not only advice and information for aspiring artists and art lovers but also access to the theoretical discourse of art that had originated in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century. This kind of literature privileged the depiction of heroic histories, such as that of the demi-god Hercules.

Goltzius produced many images of Hercules. These expose different facets of Hercules’ character that inform the 1589 engraving of The Great Hercules, his most significant and personal treatment of the subject. Our hero makes his first major entrance into the artist’s oeuvre as a prominent figure at a celebrity

5 van der Ree-Scholtens 1995, 19–313, esp. 96, 287–90.
7 On which, see Melion 1991, esp. Part 2.
wedding party, in *The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche*. This monumental engraving, dated 1587, is based on an equally ambitious ink and wash drawing by Spranger. Hercules is in attendance at the nuptial celebrations of Cupid and Psyche, whose marriage, after extended trials, is a restoration of harmony in the celestial realm. The mythological narrative, of trouble and displacement ultimately resolved through sanctified love, would have resonated strongly in Goltzius’ home city of Haarlem, a proud community whose motto was *Vicit Vm Virtus* (‘Virtue conquers violence’). Haarlem had endured particular tribulations during ‘the Troubles’: in 1572–73 a successful siege of the city by the Spanish resulted in the surrender of the starving population, the massacre of the weak local garrison and military occupation until 1577. In 1576 the damage sustained during the siege was compounded by an uncontrolled fire for which the mercenaries billeted in Haarlem were responsible. The city was grievously damaged as a consequence of these two events. In the 1580s, after the Spanish had left and Catholics had been granted equal rights with Protestants under the authority of the Prince of Orange, the city consciously promoted toleration and the arts resulting from peace and a culture of love. However, in *The Mar-

8 Leesberg 2012, part 2.312–15 (341). Orenstein 2003–2004, 87–9 (with further bibliography). Goltzius’ very first engagement with the subject appears to be an early engraving of 1575–77, after Francesco Primaticcio, which shows Hercules on a ship, defending himself against an attack by the three-bodied Geryon. See Leesberg 2012, 2.290–91 (332). An example of this print in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, is viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020.

9 Spranger’s pen and wash drawing, 397 mm by 834 mm, in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, is viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020. Goltzius’ engraving was produced from three plates measuring in total 427 mm by 849 mm. An example in the British Museum Print Room, London (1852,1211.63, 1852,1211.64, 1852,1211.65), is viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020. The long Latin text in the margin recounts at length Psyche’s ‘misery on land and sea’ before she and Cupid ‘were abundantly blessed with a daughter: eternal Happiness’. Orenstein 2003–2004, 87 and 333.

10 On the need for civic cohesion, see Rosenthal 2003, 183; de Bièvre 1988, 331 and passim. According to de Bièvre 2015, 110, the motto *Vicit Vm Virtus* surfaced in Haarlem around the time of the Spanish siege of 1572–3; it was included in the coat of arms that decorated the façade of the town hall (built in 1602–1604) and appears on the title page of Claes Jansz. Visscher’s *Plaesante Plaetsen* (‘Pleasant Places’), 1610–20, a series of etched and engraved views in the surroundings of Haarlem. See Schuckman 1991, 1.84 (149).


12 See Groeneveld, de Jongste, Speet and Temmink 1995, 141. Haarlem’s narrative of heroism and suffering during the siege was depicted in the decorations for the Triumphal Entry of Robert Dudley, Duke of Leicester (1532–1588) to Haarlem in March 1586, see van Dorsten and Strong 1964, 64–5.

13 See Spaans 1989 and, on the period 1580–1770, van der Ree-Scholtens 1995, part 2. On
riage of Cupid and Psyche, it is noticeable that, while Hercules gestures towards the scene of harmony, love and plenty, he faces in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{14}

1.2 The Labours of Hendrick

In developing the monumental The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche (1587), Goltzius advanced a new, personal technique of engraving.\textsuperscript{15} Powerful, virtuoso, elaborately swelling and subsiding contours and curved hatchings on white paper emphasise volume and plasticity. This was both an effective means graphically to ‘sculpt’ prominent muscles and metal armour and a visual rhetoric that Goltzius employed above all to characterise mature, erotically-charged, heroic masculinity. The technique is used, for example, in his series of ten Roman Heroes (1586) and in The Great Hercules (1589).\textsuperscript{16} Here the huge body, and the entire scenario, are themselves constituted as Herculean products of skilled labour, in conjunction with the physical force of the intaglio printing press.

In 1588 Goltzius published another exceptionally large print on the subject of Hercules in the very different technique of chiaroscuro woodcut, as if exchanging the polished, controlled rhetoric of the Gallic Hercules for the natural, rugged, impressive power of the Germanic one.\textsuperscript{17} Club raised, a similarly moustachioed, less excessively muscular Hercules is situated in a dark cave, about to annihilate the man-eating and fire-breathing monster Cacus, who had stolen his cattle.\textsuperscript{18} The next year, 1589, saw the publication of The Great Hercules, but this was not the end of the artist’s involvement with the subject. In 1590 Goltzius set out from Haarlem for Rome, where, probably in 1592, he drew and at some point engraved, at least in part, two antique statues in which Her-
cules figured, again in large scale: a full-length figure of the Roman emperor Commodus as Hercules holding his son Telephos, and the so-called *Farnese Hercules*, holding the three golden apples and being admired by two diminutive northerners. The two engravings were probably part of an unrealised project to record major Roman monuments and were not actually published until after Goltzius’ death in 1617.

In 1600 Goltzius gave up printmaking for oil painting but his interest in Hercules persisted. In 1613 he produced a monumental canvas triptych of Hercules and Cacus in a landscape, flanked by Mercury and Minerva. Probably made for the Haarlem lawyer and civic administrator Johan Colterman (c. 1565–1616), the central composition recalls *The Great Hercules* of 1589, although the face and body are more naturalistic, even potentially comic, and it is possible that the figure bears the likeness of Colterman’s son.

### 1.3 A Problem of Virtue

The 1589 engraving of *The Great Hercules* incorporated aspects of these various iterations and was apparently of special complexity and personal significance. Van Mander, who in his biography of Goltzius christened it ‘zijnen grooten Hercules’ (‘his great Hercules’), says that the artist took the huge print with him on his journey to Rome in 1590. Passing through Munich he encountered the Antwerp-born engraver Hans Sadeler (1550–1600), who was working at the court of the Duke of Bavaria. This meeting acquired some notoriety in the marking out of Goltzius’ life by Van Mander, who says that Goltzius adopted the humble guise of a Dutch cheese merchant while his servant, impersonating his master, engaged Sadeler in a discussion of ‘his [Goltzius’] great Hercules and other things’. For Van Mander, a friend of the artist writing a decade or so after the event, the conversation resulted in everything being ‘understood in a more measured way [*maetlijker verstaen*] and appreciated better’.

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19 Hendrick Goltzius, *Hercules and his son Telephos*, engraving 1592 (published by Herman Adolfsz. 1617), 411 mm by 299 mm; Hendrick Goltzius, *The Farnese Hercules*, engraving 1592 (published by Herman Adolfsz. 1617), 416 mm by 300 mm. Examples of the latter in the British Museum Print Room (London D.5.267 and 1854.053.104) are viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020; London 1854.053.104 is reproduced on the cover of this volume. Leesberg 2012, 2.368–75 (378–80). Luijten 2003–2004, 132–6, with further bibliography.

20 Central canvas 2070 mm by 1425 mm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem.

21 Nichols 2013, 149–53 and 141–2, with further bibliography.

to another, earlier, source however, things were not so amicable. On May 24, 1591, the renowned humanist writer on art Dominic Lampson (1532–1599) wrote from Liège to the famous neo-Stoic philosopher Justus Lipsius (1547–1606):23

But I do not approve [...] of the fact that he [Goltzius], travelling incognito, visited his colleague in art Hans Sadeler (who is to be sure himself not in the least to be despised as an artist) and himself criticised his own works to the point of open contumely, or quite demolished them, in order to draw out of Sadeler a like contempt of those same works, and that he subsequently, in a letter he left behind in the inn, bitterly jeered at and mocked the man – if this is what he has done, I say, I do not approve it.

The interpretation and value of the monumental engraving was thus a matter of dispute between its author and a well-informed, reputable and high-status colleague. Measured understanding and appreciation of the work’s virtues were the acceptable outcome of this process, but there was also potential for controversy and humiliation. Because of multiple deceptions, ridicule could be directed at the work itself, at the hoodwinked beholder and even at the artist, whose disguise of cheesemonger apparently concealed his true virtue as an artist.

1.4 A Closer Look

1.4.1 Monumentality and Temporality

The controversy over The Great Hercules (Figure 7.1) in Munich suggests that the print was well-known to, and examined closely by, contemporaries. In addition to the extraordinary body of Hercules himself, the print combines text and image and conflates a number of time-frames and narrative moments into a single pictorial field. The scene is a deep river valley, flanked by high mountains and traversed by a path whose winding and ascending route is emphasised, in the foreground, by curving ridges and furrows, like giant incisions of the engraver’s burin. The dominant main figure in some respects resembles a

23 Verum non perinde illud, quod, in itinere dissimulato quis esset, Joannem Sadlerum ὁμότεκνον (& ipsum artificem minime sane poenitendum) invisens, opera sua vel ad apertam usque vituperationem extenuaverit, aut depresserit, ut similem Sadlero corundem operum vituperationem elicerat, at deinde per literas in diversorio relictas hominem amare increpaverit, atque irriserit. Non, inquam, si fecit, probo.

statue, particularly the famous *Farnese Hercules*, a Roman copy of a Greek original. Recovered in pieces from the ancient Roman Baths of Caracalla in the 1540s and restored by one of Michelangelo’s protégés, the *Farnese Hercules* had gained a massive reputation by Goltzius’ day as an antique masterpiece.\(^{24}\) It could have been known in the Netherlands through the large print of 1562 by Jacob Bos (fl. 1549–1580), a Dutch artist working in Rome. This engraving, and one of the same subject made by Giorgio Ghisi (1520–1582) in the 1570s, was often included in examples of Antoine Lafréry’s *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae* (*Magnificent Sights of Rome*).\(^{25}\)

In Goltzius’ print, besides the monumental central figure, Hercules also appears in episodes from his ongoing life-story, involving seemingly impossible tasks that he undertook at the command of Eurystheus. Of the five events mentioned in the Latin inscription beneath the image, the last two visually frame the main figure and situate him within his extraordinary life-narrative, serving to justify the Latin inscription’s claim to Hercules’ reputation for virtue over land and sea (*terra marique*).\(^{26}\) In the middle distance to the left, in a vignette inspired by an engraving by Cornelis Cort after a painting by Frans Floris, Hercules is wrestling with the shape-shifting river-god Achelous.\(^{27}\) Achelous, having become a slithering snake in his effort to overcome his enemy, has now taken the form of a raging bull. The battle was motivated by competition for the hand in marriage of Deianeira, daughter of a local king. Hercules is disarming his foe by ripping off one of his horns, the potent ‘stump’ [*truncus*] that is grasped in *The Great Hercules*’ right hand. In the far distance, over the

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\(^{24}\) For the influence of the *Farnese Hercules* on other artists see Verbanck-Pierard and Macostay in this volume.

\(^{25}\) Jacob Bos, *Omnium elegantissimum Herculis signum Gliconis Atheniensis peritiissimi artificis manu fabrefactum, quod Pauli III Pont. Max. in thermarum Antoniniarum ruderibus inventum, et in domus Farnesiana ad campum Florae interiori porticu locatum* (*The most elegant statue of Hercules of all, made by the hand of the most skilled artist, Glycon of Athens, which was discovered in the papacy of Paul III in the Antonian baths, and placed in the Villa Farnese, in the interior portico, near Flora’s Field*), 1562, engraving 447 mm by 302 mm. Giorgio Ghisi, *The Farnese Hercules*, c. 1578, engraving 360 mm by 216 mm. Examples of both engravings in the Print Room of the British Museum, London are viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020: Bos 1869,0410.2209; Ghisi 1865,0610.15. On the *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae*: Zorach 2008.

\(^{26}\) Holman 1993, 401.

\(^{27}\) 1563, engraving 223 mm by 285 mm. An example in the Print Room of the British Museum (London F,1,282) is viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020. One of a series of ten plates of *The Twelve Labours of Hercules*, see Sellink 2000, 3,34 (177).
river, two water-nymphs, the Naiades, have filled Achelous’ amputated horn with fruits of the earth and present the cornucopia to Deianeira. In the other episode, to the right of the great figure, Hercules is engaged in a fight to the death with Antaeus, the half-giant son of Poseidon, god of the sea, and Gaia, the personification of the earth. Since Antaeus drew his own great strength from his mother, Hercules outwitted his adversary by lifting him up and squeezing him tightly, severing his connection with the ground.

The pictorial field is, however, dominated by the massive, excessively muscled central figure which straddles the landscape. This imposes its mass upon the beholder; the first impression is of a monumental statue. Firmly outlined against the sky, stone-hard muscles are defined and modelled by the swelling incisions of the burin. The marks of a sculptor’s chisel and the play of strong light on unpolished white marble are evoked with curving hatching and cross-hatching, often punctuated by pricked dots, which give way to patches of untouched paper. It has been noticed by others that the physique and the open-legged stance are characteristic signs of hyper-masculinity in this period, as indeed they are now. The stance is reminiscent of a recognisable type of highly muscled Hercules sculpture, such as a bronze statuette made in the middle years of the 1560s that is attributed to the Dutch emigrant to Florence Willem Danielsz. van Tetrode (c. 1525–1580).

1.4.2 A Complex Body Politic

There is, furthermore, a significant resemblance between the huge, straddling figure and a print of The Colossus of Rhodes designed by Haarlem’s leading artist MaartenvanHeemskerck (1498–1574) (Figure 7.2). Published in 1570, the engraving formed part of Heemskerck’s novel series The Eight Wonders of the World. The giant statue of Helios, the Titan-god of the sun, reputedly spanned

28 The river is more evident in Cort’s print (see n. 27).
29 For these two episodes as staples of Hercules’ life-narrative, integrated into his depictions as additions to episodes within the associated text, see Capriotti in Allan, Anagnostou-Laoutides and Stafford (eds) 2020.
30 For Goltzius’ ‘dotted lozenge’ technique, see Brown 2012.
31 Attributed to Willem Danielsz. van Tetrode, Hercules Pomarius, bronze c. 1562–1567, 395 mm high. An example in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, is viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020. The similar pose does not necessarily mean that Tetrode’s bronze was the inspiration for Goltzius’ print. For other possible sources of the pose, compare Leeflang and Luijten 2003–2004, 106–7 and 316 notes 80–3.
32 Philips Galle after Maarten van Heemskerck, The Colossus of Rhodes, engraving 1572, 211 mm × 256 mm. Plate numbered four of the series The Eight Wonders of the World, lettered below left ‘Martinus Heemskerck Inve’ and ‘P. Galle fecit’.
the harbour of the Greek city in the third century BCE. A connection with *The Great Hercules* is supported by a text presumed to be dedicated to the Colossus of Rhodes preserved in *The Greek Anthology*. This twice uses the *topos* ‘on land and sea’ that appears in the Latin inscription in Goltzius’ print and names Hercules as an ancestor of all victors, justifying their erection of Colossi:

> To you, o Sun, the people of Dorian Rhodes set up this bronze statue reaching to Olympus, when they had pacified the waves of war and crowned their city with the spoils taken from the enemy. Not only over the land but also on sea did they kindle the lovely torch of freedom and independence. For to the descendants of Hercules belongs dominion over land and sea.

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33 Trans. Higgins 2013, 134, with discussion. For the original Greek and an alternative translation, see Paton 1920, 386–7. *The Greek Anthology* was first published in Florence in 1494.
The shared *topos* ‘on land and sea’ and the similarity between the colossal figures in the two prints suggest that *The Great Hercules* might, like *The Colossus of Rhodes*, be understood with reference to ‘the lovely torch of freedom and independence’. Although Hercules was during this period claimed as an ancestor of the Habsburg dynasty and thus identified with Habsburg sovereignty, Holman interprets *The Great Hercules* as a symbolic representation of the powerful new polity that emerged as a result of the Revolt of the Netherlands against the Habsburg monarch Philip II of Spain. In her insightful and meticulously researched 1993 article, Holman recognises that *The Great Hercules* is a giant with ‘too many muscles’ that are not only ‘overstocked’ but ‘over-stated’ and suggests that it is an allegory in which different constituencies of the United Provinces of the Netherlands were bound together in a rather similar way to Hercules’ bulging physique. In 2002, Kunzle simplified Holman’s subtle argument by describing Hercules’ muscular exaggeration and distortion as ‘an anatomical hyperbole for the newfound might of the Dutch Republic’.

The pointed visual and textual analogies between *The Great Hercules* and *The Colossus of Rhodes* suggest that the Dutch body politic was being conceived through the microcosm of the civic history of Haarlem. In promoting virtue over violence, Haarlem was comparable to Rhodes which, according to Strabo’s *Geography*, written between 20 BCE and 23 CE, was a city without equal for its improvements and good order (14.2.5–13). The Colossus was erected to commemorate forever Rhodes’ defeat of the ruler of Cyprus, whose son unsuccessfully besieged the city in 305 BCE. However, the Colossus stood astride Rhodes’ harbour for only fifty-four years before it was toppled by an earthquake. Haarlem had itself been granted noble privileges in 1219 and city status in 1245 as a result of the successful siege of Damietta in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Fifth Crusade. Haarlem’s own ‘earthquake’ happened in 1572, just two years after the publication of Van Heemskerck’s print when, like Rhodes, the city was besieged by the son of a foreign governor. Unlike its illustrious predecessor, Haarlem gave way.

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34 Bull 2006, 91–92 and 139–140. Bull is incorrect in claiming that Hercules is ‘conspicuous by his absence’ from the Netherlands. For the Habsburg Hercules in relation to the iconography of the Charles Alexander, Duke of Lorraine, see Verbanck-Piérard in this volume.
36 See Higgins 2013, 125 and *passim*.
37 Present day Dimyat in northern Egypt. For the omnipresence of antiquity in Netherlandish historiography of this period, see de Glas 2011, 89–90.
38 Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo (1537–83), son of the Habsburg governor, Don Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, third Duke of Alva.
When situated in Haarlem in the midst of ‘the Troubles’ that beset the Habsburg Netherlands in the second half of the sixteenth century, The Great Hercules can be recognized as a body politic. It is, however, an incoherent, contradictory body in which could be sought both the mythical source of Habsburg sovereignty and the ‘freedom and independence over land and sea’ desired by adherents of the Dutch Revolt. In 1589, furthermore, both the United Provinces of the Netherlands and the city of Haarlem were not unified wholes but undergoing profound instability and change in which physical and symbolic violence and destruction existed alongside desire to restore authority, peace and harmony. The question of whether Virtue would conquer Violence, or vice-versa, hung in the balance.

1.4.3 Hercules on the Move

It is notable, then, that The Great Hercules does not hold the three golden apples stolen from the garden of the Hesperides, unlike Tetrode’s Hercules Pomarius and The Farnese Hercules. According to Van Mander:39

In relation to the attainment of this golden apple, the antique statues of Hercules are generally made [with] three apples in the left hand, as one may see in Rome in the copper statue on the Capitol, and the Marble one in the Palace [...] of Cardinal Farnese. Which [apples] are also not without meaning but signify the three powers of Hercules, which is virtue. The first, to moderate wrath, the second, to avoid avarice, the third to constrain lust, and not to serve it.

The omission of the apples places The Great Hercules at a time before the hero’s penultimate or final labour in the garden of the Hesperides, whereby he gained stability through the acquisition of these three symbols of virtue and, by implication, eternal life. Moreover, looking closely, it becomes apparent that, in addition to his resemblance to a monumental statue, Goltzius’ great figure of

39 Van Mander 1604, fol. 79r:
“Om dit gouden Appel-halen, worden Herculi van den ouden Beeldsnijderen, in de slincker handt ghemeenlijk ghemaectk dry Appelen, also men te Room aen den coperen op t’Capitoliun en den Marmoren in’t Paleys oft heerlijk huys des doorluchtigen Cardinaels Farnesij, mach sien: welcke oock sonder beteyckeninghen niet en zijn: maer wijzen aen dry crachten Herculis, dat is, der deught. Eerst, te matighen den toorn: ten tweeden, te mijden giericheyt, ten derden, den wellusten de dwinghen, en niet te dienen.”
Van Mander mentions specifically the Farnese Hercules and the gilded-bronze Hercules on the Capitoline, i.e. Hercules of the Forum Boarium, now in the Capitoline Museum, Rome.
Hercules is a semi-divine hero in motion, travelling far and wide and labouring towards immortality. Flanked by life-events that occupy the same pictorial field, he is not only straddling this landscape but also striding through it, travelling uphill along a winding path that ultimately breaches the frame to impinge upon the space of the beholder.\(^{40}\) While the head turns back and the torso is shown almost frontally, the massive legs point forward, although in slightly different directions. The big toes are flexed as if walking and the tattered skin of the Nemean lion, fluttering out behind the figure, enhances the impression of movement.

There is, furthermore, reason to believe that some of the print’s classically educated and acutely observant viewers would have perceived the figure as not only poised between stasis and progress but also at the crossroads, faced with the wider, more accessible route of material life and the difficult, rocky road to glory.\(^{41}\) The battle with Antaeus, to the right of the great figure on the well-worn path leading towards us, is generally supposed to have taken place immediately before Hercules’ visit to the garden of the Hesperides. In the print, the direction of Antaeus’ gaze and the formation of the rocky cliff and subtle lighting behind the struggling pair hint at another, narrow, elusive route climbing up the craggy mountain, presumably in the direction of Hercules’ ultimate, elevated destination.

Bass has also argued that the great central figure of Hercules positions the artist-hero between virtuous, but ultimately fatal, love for his bride Deianeira and lustful desire for his adversary Antaeus.\(^{42}\) This implies a kind of ‘Choice of Hercules’ in which the conventional iconography, of Hercules tempted by two female personifications of Virtue and Vice, has been replaced by a Hercules who moves between two violent episodes from his own life-narrative. In these two battles, virtue and vice are not opposed but profoundly entangled, both with one another and with different kinds of desire.

The ‘Choice of Hercules’ between virtue and vice was, significantly, central to Hercules Prodicius, an allegorical travelogue and mirror for princes published in

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\(^{40}\) Noticed independently in Bass 2016, 52.

\(^{41}\) On the tradition of ‘Hercules at the crossroads’, see the Introduction to this volume, and Panofsky 1930.

\(^{42}\) Bass 2016, 52 and 54. Bass argues further that ‘Goltzius’s intentions with this work were personal rather than political’ and that elsewhere in his oeuvre he ‘attested to the significance of love as a generative force in his artistic enterprise’. On homoerotic desire in the encounter between Hercules and Antaeus, see Simons 2008, 637–645. Bass states that Deianeira is not depicted in the group of three naked women, but cf. ‘Hercules and a naked Deianeira after Goltzius’ by Jacob Matham c. 1590, see Widerkehr 2007, 2.61 and 67 (174). An example in the Print Room of the British Museum, London (1856,0209.287) is viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020.
Antwerp by the antiquarian Stephanus Vinandus Pighius (1520–1604) in 1587, two years before the appearance of The Great Hercules. The text recounted Pighius’ travels through Austria to Rome in the company of his young patron and pupil Karl-Friedrich, heir to the Duchy of Jülich Cleve-Berg. Having been welcomed at a number of courts and improved by a variety of sights and antiquities, especially antique statues of Hercules, Prince Karl-Friedrich died in Rome at the age of twenty. The book is an account of and monument to Karl-Friedrich’s exemplary ascent to immortal virtue through travel and the study of classical antiquity, especially Hercules. Hercules Prodiacus surely caught the eye of Goltzius and his circle because of the artist’s own origins in Mulbracht, in the Duchy of Jülich Cleve-Berg, and his own planned journey to Italy in the year following the publication of the print.

1.5 Hendrick/Hercules

In addition to recognition of The Great Hercules as a body politic, the print can thus be interpreted with reference to the artist, as the embodiment and articulation of his artistic virtuosity and heroic labour. Pighius’s Hercules Prodiacus and Van Mander’s biography of the artist suggest that during his travels Hendrick emulated prince Karl-Friedrich in his close, self-improving identification with Hercules. Van Mander presents the artist’s departure for Italy as a dramatic choice, made after years of physical and mental suffering, between a living death in Haarlem and the prospect of fulfilment by encountering great

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43 On the story of the choice of Herakles told by the fifth-century BCE sophist Prodikos of Keos and reported in Xenophon’s Memorabilia (2.1.21), see the Introduction to this volume. On Hercules Prodiacus in the sixteenth century, see Laureys 2000, passim, esp. 277. Further on Pighius, see Jongkees 1954, 119–85. For more on Hercules’ role as a guide/mirror for princes, see Deligiannis in this volume on the Gonzagas, and Sienkewicz in Allan, Anagnostou-Laoutides and Stafford (eds) 2020 on the Medicis.

44 Pighius develops an allegorical interpretation of three Hercules statues in Rome, in which he associated the acquisition of the three golden apples with munera Virtutis (‘the rewards of Virtue’). For discussion, see Laureys 2000, 286, 291–2, 298–301. Van Mander, given his familiarity with at least two of these statues (see n. 39, above), may well have been aware of Pighius’ interpretation of them.

45 Laureys 2000, passim. As the grandson of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I (1503–1564), Karl-Friedrich was strategically important in religious and dynastic politics. He was shown great honour during his travels. See Laureys 2000, 270 and Jongkees 1954, 159–67.

46 For Goltzius’ origins in Mulbracht, a village in the dukedom of Jülich-Berg-Cleve, see Van Mander 1604, fol. 282r with Miedema 1994–1999, vol. 5, 177–9. Goltzius (b. 1558) and Karl-Friedrich (b. 1555) were very close in age.
works of art in Rome, even if he died in the attempt. As in Hercules Prodicius, the subject of Hercules (here in both noble and boorish forms) then becomes central to Het Schilder-boek’s account of Goltzius’ journey across land and sea, travelling incognito and in uncouth disguises. As discussed earlier, in Munich The Great Hercules was the focus of his conflict with another elite artist (an alter-ego), whilst being impersonated by his servant and disguised as a Dutch cheese-merchant. In Rome he adopted the Germanic persona of ‘Hendrick van Bracht’ when drawing ‘the best and most important antique statues’ that included, of course, the renowned, monumental figures of Hercules mentioned by Pighius and Van Mander. Ridiculed by young artists in Rome, Goltzius’ true identity only became fully apparent as he approached his ultimate destination, Naples, when he was recognised by a noble companion. In Naples, ‘I believe in the palace of the viceroy, Goltzius drew an excellent antique statue, a seated young Hercules.’

1.6 The Great Hercules as Hydra

So far, The Great Hercules could have been perceived as a body politic that Goltzius’ circle could have identified with Haarlem (both as a city with a distinctive history and as a microcosm of the larger polity that was being created by wrestling with Habsburg authority, in the intimate manner of Hercules and his alter-ego Antaeus). It could also have been understood as an avatar for the

“When he saw that his life (as one says) was hanging by a silken thread [...] Goltzius at last decided, even though he was weak, to travel to Italy, hoping in that way to get some improvement, or at least to see all the ingenious or beautiful works of art in Italy before he died [...].”

48 An allusion to Mulbracht, Goltzius’ birthplace in Jülich Cleve-Berg and the place of origin of Pighius’s hero, prince Karl-Friedrich. This ‘somewhat boorish’ persona can be related to the Germanic and comic dimensions of Hercules: in Rome Goltzius’ audience consisted of young artists, who, according to Van Mander, ‘expected that they were more likely to see something laughable than astonishing’. However, Van Mander then compared their misperception to the members of the Roman Senate at the time of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who thought initially that the figure of a Danubian farmer (Danubischen Boer) was ‘some human in animal form’, but when they listened to him, ‘judged him at once to be a God’. On this comparison, see Miedema 1994–1999, vol. 1, 390 and vol. 5, 191–2.

49 The drawing is not known; the building was identified by Reznicek as the Palazzo Nuovo, at that time the residence of the Spanish viceroy Juan de Zuñiga, 1st Duke of Peñaranda (1551–1608). Zuñiga was the viceroy of Philip II of Spain, a member of the Habsburg dynasty that was itself identified with Hercules. Further, see Miedema 1994–1999, vol. 1, 392, 393, vol. 5, 194, n. 183, Reznicek 1961, vol. 1, 84, n. 4.
artist himself (especially in relation to his life-changing journey to Italy). The print shows the hero towering over the scene as a Colossus and at the same time engaged in the violent conquest of foes associated with land and water. The great figure of Hercules is a permanent monument to victory that is apparently moving forward along a path that leads, visually, into our own world. Contemporary viewers, particularly those who knew Pighius’ Hercules Prodicius, could have observed that he is, moreover, poised at the crossroads between the broad and rutted ‘low road’ towards the ease and pleasures of an ignoble life and the difficult, steep and elusive ‘high road’ that leads to honour, virtue and immortality.

As we struggle to contain and stabilise The Great Hercules, the subject moves and multiplies like the proliferating heads of the hydra, one of Hercules’ most challenging opponents. In our encounters with The Great Hercules so far, we have experienced a contradiction between the anatomical excess and violent narrative of the image and the Latin inscription, which asks us to acknowledge Hercules’ ‘virtue on land and sea’ and emphasizes his ultimate capacity, through his labours, to ‘enrich the stump with prolific fruits’. The print can be described as a monster, not only because of the figure’s extraordinary physical size and preternatural shape, but also because the image is unnaturally massive and uncontrollable from the point of view of interpretation. It is both contradictory, in claiming virtue through violence, and massively overdetermined, in that its appearance can be accounted for in more than one way. We saw, moreover, that the image accommodates multiple temporalities: the eternal time of a colossal monument, the narrative time of the episodes from Hercules’ life, the progressive time of our hero’s ongoing journey and the moment of choice of Hercules at the crossroads.

The potential of the image to generate interpretations does not stop there. Fashionably moustachioed but beardless, the Great Hercules can accommodate both a contemporary, martial, Batavian version of the Roman Hercules – described by Tacitus as a cult followed by the fierce, rebellious tribes of the lower Rhine – and, in its graphic character and control, the Gallic Hercules, an exemplar of the power of rhetoric and reason. As will be explained later, vir-
tue could be claimed for both figures. Whilst that of the Batavian Hercules was expressed in the strategic use of physical force, the mature, artful, Gallic Hercules leads the community by the golden threads of rhetoric. We shall see too, that *The Great Hercules* is understandable not only as a master over ‘land and sea’ but also as a figure of profound suffering, flayed, mutilated and transfigured by fire in search of rejuvenation and resurrection.

Most challengingly, perhaps, Goltzius’ encounter with Sadeler in Munich suggests that the (suppressed) laughter and distaste that *The Great Hercules* can now provoke was also a possible response to the print in the sixteenth century. The antique characterisation of Hercules as sometimes ridiculous was accessible through literature, vases and minor arts; for example, our hero was often made a fool of by his pan-sexual desires, and was depicted and described dressing and acting like a woman when in thrall to his mistress Omphale. The ancient tale of ‘Hercules black-bottom’ also inspired one of Erasmus’s *Adages* and appears in the rip-roaring account of Hercules’ adventures published in 1604 by Van Mander. In this tale two young brothers, the Kerkōpes, who were notorious thieves, tried to rob Hercules while he was asleep, whereupon they were bound by Hercules and strung up over his shoulder. Hanging head-first, the boys were confronted with Hercules’ arse, covered with black hairs. They discussed their mother’s invocation of the adage ‘not to fall in with a “black-bottom”’, because in ancient Greece a hairy black (rather than smooth white) rump denoted a warlike, valiant man who would punish misdeeds. Van Mander elaborated on the classical story for humorous effect by recounting that one of the two boys was faced with Hercules’ *schamelheyt* (‘shameful parts’) and that his hairy bottom caused hilarity not only in Hercules himself,

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51 Hallowell 1962, 242–55 and Plett 2004, 419–20. For contemporary images and descriptions of the Gallic Hercules, see ‘Eloquentia fortitudine praestantior’ in Andrea Alciato’s *Emblemata* (Alciato no date a), reproduced in the Introduction to this volume (Figure i.1).

52 Magnaguagno-Korazija 1983, 80–82, considers the print is an ironic, mannerist parody of the Renaissance conception of Hercules as the epitome of virtue.

53 Wind 1998, 1.173; Galinsky 1972, 81–100. On the Omphale myth, see briefly the Preface (§ 3.3) and Introduction (§ 5 and § 6) of this volume; for more detail on the ancient sources, see Stafford 2012, 132–4, also 10, 55, 60–2, 71, 83–4, 98, 106, 146, 152, 186.

54 The story, while not well attested in extant ancient literature, must have been well known in antiquity, since it appears as part of the sculptural programmes of two archaic temples, the Heraion at Foce del Sele (c. 560 BCE) and Temple C at Selinous (c. 520 BCE): on the ancient sources see Stafford 2012, 60–63. For the Adage of Erasmus, see Barker 2001, 155–6. Cf. Van Mander 1604, fol. 74r–79v, 77v. For the importance of Erasmus in the province of Holland, see de Glas 2011, 84.

55 Barker 2001, 156.
'who was a fun-loving [bootsliefdigh] man', but also in the two boys, 'who were laughing so very heartily that Hercules asked the reason' and in appreciation of the joke, let them walk free.56

When considered from this earthy perspective, there is a potentially laughable contrast in *The Great Hercules* between the knobbly physique, with its double phallus of horn and club, and the very small actual penis, as was noticed by Magnaguagno-Korazija in 1983.57 Three centuries earlier, in a publication on the human figure of 1682, the Dutch art theorist Willem Goeree (1635–1711) stated that:58

The image of a man must also not resemble a dried-out codfish, nor through the swollenness of the muscles be as knobbly as a sack of tubers. Because Goltzius somewhat violated this in his Great Hercules, his print has been called ‘The Apple-sack of Goltzius’ (*den Appel-sak van Goltzius*) since it was published.

Thus, from the beginning, the honoured Hercules, seeking his three golden apples, was apparently regarded by some viewers as an earthy sack of apples. For Dutch speakers this metaphor was potentially specifically genital, since the word *zak* is slang for scrotum and the etymology of *zaadbal*, the vernacular term for testicle, is ‘seed ball’, the same thing conceptually as an apple. Intriguingly, a charcoal drawing in the British Museum currently attributed to Goltzius depicts a paunchy, rather doleful-looking Hercules with the suggestively round paw of his lion-skin hanging low-down between his striding legs.59

56 Van Mander 1604, fol. 77r.
57 Magnaguagno-Korazija 1983, 80.
58 Goeree 1682, 406, my translation and emphasis:

"Ook en moeten de Menschbeelden geen uytgedroogde Stockvissen gelijken, noch door de gezwellenthed of der Muskelen soo knobbelig zijn als een sak met knollen. Om dat Goltzius hem dat hier in aan sijnen Grooten Herkules wat vergrepen had, is sijn print, sederd de tijd datse uytquam, 'den Appel-sak van Goltzius' genoemt."

2.1 Grappling with Masculine Virtue

So how to embrace, rather than battle to conquer, this monstrous overdetermination? In his study of wonders, marvels and monsters in early modern culture, the literary historian Peter Platt concluded that:

If the urge to control the marvellous is great, if the preternatural is always threatened with naturalisation [...], it is the power of the marvellous that necessitates such a response. For the marvellous and the monstrous are almost always in danger of eluding mastery and classification. Yet it is this very intractability that can force or facilitate a recharting – of the map of artistic possibility, of the body, of the known world, or human potential.

This second section of the chapter explores what happens if we take this intractability to heart, adopting the feminist thinker Donna Haraway’s approach of ‘staying with the trouble’, of working with the monstrosity rather than seeking to contain and ultimately resolve it. What if we accept that Goltzius’ The Great Hercules does not represent any stable entity, whether natural, preternatural, supernatural or conceptual? According to Prodikos, Hercules, when confronted by a crossroads with two divergent paths, was placed in an unstable condition of confusion and uncertainty known as aporia. The literal meaning of the Greek a-poros is a path that is blocked. As Nagel and Pericolo have shown, works of art that generate a state of perplexity or aporia, including works that can be associated with more than one ‘subject’ at the same time, emerged in Europe in the period between 1400 and 1700, and they point out that aporia, according to Aristotle, was the initial impulse to philosophical thought. I would suggest that the marvelousness, and the monstrosity, of The Great Hercules engraving lies in its aporetic capacity to mobilise and challenge its viewers by offering multiple, contradictory paths, and requiring them – like Hercules – to find a way among them. In doing so, it can be seen to force or facilitate a re-charting of the masculine subject for the ‘new world’ that was incipient in 1589.

The ultimate subject of the wondering/wandering inspired by The Great Hercules is masculinity, conceived not as an essence but as a form of justification.

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60 Platt 1999, 22.
62 Davies 2013, 8–9.
for nobility and hence authority and control. The question of masculinity lies at
the heart of the work because Hercules was the recognised exemplar of virtue
and the etymology of virtue itself derives from the Latin noun *vir* (man). Cesare
Ripa (1560–1622) articulated these links in his *Iconologia*, an influential com-
pendium of emblems, personifications and symbols first published in 1593.64
As the first line of the Latin inscription beneath Goltzius’ image indicates, the
virtue of its subject was taken for granted by contemporaries. Ripa repeatedly
described Hercules as the exemplar of heroic virtue and Van Mander called
Hercules virtue itself.65

Virtue thus clearly connoted manliness, manhood, strength, vigour, courage,
excellence, particularly in battle. Yet virtue is also ‘troubled’ by an ambivalence
in which the active manifestation of courage that triumphs over adversaries
through the use of physical force exists alongside Aristotelian and Stoic tradi-
tions of virtue as a quality or performance of mind or soul. For these thinkers,
virtue is an unflinching, ongoing constancy that is the perfect ‘golden mean’
between extremes: it is not swayed by temptation or passion but is attained
by practice and governed by reason.66 Considered in these terms, the virtue
sought by *Hercules Prodicius* – ‘Hercules at the crossroads’ – is thus the path of
*aretē*, constantly mediating between excess on both sides, rather than a simple,
binary opposition to vice.67 In relation to an engraving, this path could be ima-
gined as an elusive but vital line of supreme quality that, in negotiating between
extreme positions such as cruelty and suffering, lust and apathy, passion and
reason, flesh and stone, linked as well as separated them.

64 C. *Ripa* Perugino 1593, 289, 290. In C. *Ripa* Perugino 1644, 85, a Dutch translation of
the 1624–5 edition of Ripa expanded by G.Z. Castellini, the entry entitled *Virtu, naer de
medaglie van Alexander* (‘Virtue after a medal of Alexander’) reads:
“Van een Mannelijck opsicht is *Virtus* vertoont, om dat haer naam van *Viro* of *Viribus*,
dat is, van ’t Mannelijck af komt, en toont alsoo haere dapperheyd, die een deughlijck Man
betaemt.”
“Virtue is shown in a masculine aspect, because her name derives from *Viro* or *Viribus*,
that is from ‘manliness’, and so shows her prowess, that befits a virtuous man.”
See further Woodall 2003, 7–25.

65 For example, Ripa 1593, 290; for Van Mander 1604, fol. 78r–y, see below p. 215.
See further below, n. 70.


67 Van Mander 1604, fol. 78r–y: ‘Hercules wort veel geheouden te wesen de deught, daer toe
wort t’woordt *Aretē* ghetrocken, t’welck deught te segghen is.’ (‘Hercules is much held to
be virtuousness, from which the word *Aretē* is drawn, that is to say virtue.’) Cf. Braider’s
discussion of the temporality of Annibale Carracci’s *Choice of Hercules* (1595–97, Naples,
Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte) and the implications of the theme for the emergence
of the ‘modern subject’ (Braider 2004, 111–43).
What is the nature of this elusive path or line, and where does it lead? Nagel and Pericolo explain that:68

\textit{a-poros}, a path that is blocked, is not the same as a non-path, a path never opened. It means that there is a path [...], or rather there \textit{has been} a way [...], and yet it is somehow impassable. An aporia suggests that there was once the possibility of resolution; it points out that there is a way – perhaps pointing it out for the first time, for there was no need to acknowledge the path itself as long as it was a means to an end. The aporia forces us not merely to come up with a different solution; by necessity it forces a reconsideration of the approach itself, the ‘thinking of the path', an enquiry that also figures a history. Why is the path here? How was it beaten? Why is the path \textit{no longer} passable? What other paths are inspired by the existence of this one?

As we have seen, for contemporaries Hercules' primary destination was the garden of the Hesperides, Hera's orchard in a far western corner of the world in which a tree bearing golden apples grows. Van Mander followed the expanded, 1603 edition of Ripa when he claimed that the three golden apples held by the famous statues in Rome signified ‘three powers of Hercules, which is virtue. The first, to moderate wrath, the second, to avoid avarice, the third to constrain lust, and not to serve it.'69 Significantly, however, in Ripa's original text these three powers led to a more elevated goal.70

When reason has so far suppressed the sensory affections that it is indi-

visibly joined to the virtuous mean, and made pure and illustrious, it

surpasses human excellence and approaches the Angels.

Here the acquisition of the three apples represents significant progress \textit{en route} to a condition of virtue in which materiality is contained, purified and ultimately transfigured into incorporeal, angelic form. Before attaining these golden fruits and the ultimate, intangible reward that they promise, the bur-

\begin{footnotesize}
68 Nagel and Pericolo 2010, 9.
69 See above, n. 39.
70 Ripa 1603, 507 on ‘Virtu Heroica’:
È quando la ragione hâ talmente sottoposti gli affetti sensitiui, che sia giunto al punto indivisibile de I mezzi virtuosi, & fattosi pura, & illustre, che trappassi l'eccellenza humana, & à gli angeli si accosti."
The same phrase (‘Virtu Heroica’) is found in Rinaldi 1538, 77.
\end{footnotesize}
geoning body of *The Great Hercules* is situated in a masculine life-narrative of passion and excess rather than reasoned moderation. Infamously, in a fit of madness he slaughtered his own children, and Van Mander recounts at length and with relish stories of murderous strength and numerous violent contests with monstrous enemies, often motivated by passion rather than reason.⁷¹ Whilst these episodes could – with some difficulty – be moralised, they could not articulate a consistent ‘golden mean’.⁷² Hercules can achieve true virtue only after the completion of his life-story, and this noble aim justifies the cruel and vicious deeds that he performs along the way. Hercules’ labours and other adventures were in fact less demonstrations of virtue in the civilised, Aristotelian sense of negotiating a perfect, reasoned path through excess than repeated trials of the ancient, primitive conception of virtue as an inherent, embodied potency or efficacy, a natural life-force that was linked with sexual virility, physical strength and the principle of kill or be killed.⁷³ Besieged Haarlem had recently been subjected to this principle and according to Van Mander, Goltzius regarded his journey to Italy as a fight for survival and recognition that involved the conquest of adversity by whatever means necessary, extending to death itself.⁷⁴

### 2.2 The Path and End of Suffering

Indeed, in order to become ‘pure and illustrious’, Hercules had not only to be repeatedly brutal but also to suffer a searing demise: ‘a path that is blocked’. As described at length in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and more briefly by Van Mander, Hercules’ death was an agonizing experience of blistering and disintegrating muscles. Set off by the heat from a sacrificial altar, his poisoned tunic began to ‘melt into his flesh’. It had been contaminated with the searing blood of the hydra, and sent to him by his wife Deianeira (‘the man-destroyer’) in the mistaken belief that it would restore his love for her.⁷⁵

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⁷¹ On Hercules’ murderous madness and its depictions in the eighteenth century, see Macsotay and Caballero Gonzalez in this volume.
⁷³ Woodall 2003, esp. 9–11; Braider 2008, 113.
⁷⁴ Van Mander 1604, fol. 282⁶, see n. 47.
⁷⁵ Van Mander 1604, fol. 74⁶. Ovid’s description of the hero’s death is gorier than the earliest description, in Sophocles’ *Women of Trachis*, but surpassed in horrific detail by the slightly later Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus*. 
The poisoned garment, cleaving to him, ripped his skin, heat shriveled, from his burning flesh. Or, tightening on him, as his great strength pulled, stripped with it the great muscles from his limbs, leaving his huge bones bare.

Importantly, though, Hercules' corporeal death was followed by an apotheosis in which the hero was resurrected and rejuvenated 'in spirit form.' Ovid described this spirit dimension in terms not just of containment but of the exclusion of his earthly, bodily origin: 'Unlike the well-known mortal shape derived by nature of his mother, he kept traces only of his father Jupiter.'

Although situated within his life-narrative as a hardened warrior, the principal figure of *The Great Hercules* print anticipates the tortured condition of its ultimate, transformative death as a physical being. It is noticeable that in places the ragged hide of the Nemean lion looks like a woven textile, draped over his left arm, fluttering above his right shoulder and hanging down between his legs. One is reminded of the fatal tunic sent to Hercules by Deianeira, the garment that seared his skin and laid his great muscles bare. Moreover, a comparison between Goltzius' print and the immensely influential myological images of Andreas Vesalius' (1514–1564) anatomical atlas *De humani corporis fabrica (On the Structure of the Human Body, 1543)* not only makes the exaggeration of the muscles in *The Great Hercules* immediately apparent but also exposes significant visual similarities between them that seem likely to have been noticed by educated contemporaries. For example, both *The Great Hercules* and the Vesalian illustrations are large-format prints in which a huge, naked, male fig-

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77 An interest in Vesalian imagery in Haarlem is indicated by the inclusion of a book of anatomical diagrams in the foreground of Maarten van Heemskerck's *St Luke Painting the Virgin* of c. 1550, as discussed by Veldman 1977, 115–21. In a postscript to a letter of 17 February 1595, Pieter Pauw (1564–1617), professor of anatomy at Leiden University since 1589, mentioned to his correspondent Jan Jacob Orlers, that 'Morghen (wesende Zaterdagh), beghinne ik de tweede anatomie. Ghelieft u. e. Tzelfde Goltzius ofte iemand anders te ver-wittighen' ('Tomorrow (being Saturday), I will start the second anatomy. May it please you to notify the same Goltzius or anyone else') Prinsen 1905, 173. In 1618, Pauw's successor Ottho van Heurne (1577–1652) purchased an example of *The Great Hercules* that is recorded as mounted on panel and framed in a 1622 inventory of the anatomy theatre. See further, Huisman 2009, 59. Goeree's description of *The Great Hercules* as an Appelsak also indicates that the anatomical allusions of the Hercules figure were recognised, because the criticism appears in the chapter of his treatise *Menschkunde* ('The Study of Man') devoted to musculature (Goeree 1682, 406).
ture towers over a landscape, dominating the horizon. In both Vesalius’s *Prima Musculorum Tabula* (‘First Diagram of the Muscles’) and Goltzius’ print the muscles are hypertonic and highly articulated by means of the incised lines. The depicted bodies have been stripped of, or appear to lack, the cutaneous and sub-cutaneous layers that normally cover and soften the muscular structures.78 Both figures are, in effect, flayed.

As Kusukawa has pointed out, Vesalian anatomical illustration was associated with the figure of Hercules. She convincingly connects the explicit use of the *Belvedere Torso* as the model for one of the figures in *De humani corporis fabrica librorum epitome* (Basel 1543) with the perfect ‘Herculean’ body.79 We have seen that *The Great Hercules* too had an honoured antique exemplar in the statue of the *Farnese Hercules*. However, more pertinent to the tortured flesh that is currently being foregrounded is a myological illustration in the *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano* (‘History of the composition of the human body’) by Juan de Valverde (1525–1588), a Dutch edition of which was published in Antwerp in 1568 (Figure 7.3).80 De Valverde’s illustrations were mostly adapted from Vesalius but an original engraving that corresponds to the woodcut *Prima Musculorum Tabula* in Vesalius shows a full-length muscle-man holding a skin in one hand and a knife in the other. The scene has been compared with Saint Bartholomew holding his flayed skin in Michelangelo’s *Last Judgement* (1536–1541, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City), which the artist would almost certainly have known, but those with a modicum of classical education were equally likely to have recognised the figure as some kind of Hercules; the large, ragged pelt with paw-like appendages resembles that of a lion as much as a man.81 As comparison with Giambattista della Porta’s (c. 1535–1615) *De humana physiognomonia* (On Human Physiognomy) of 1586 reveals, the facial skin in particular, with its deep eye sockets, squashed nose and hairy extension below the chin, evokes the physiognomic characteristics of a lion (Figure 7.4).82

78 Kusukawa 2012, 210. The myological figures in *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* were all set in landscapes and approximately 425 mm by 285 mm. The illustrations are viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020.
79 Kusukawa 2012, 215 and fig. 10.9.
80 de Valverde 1568. I consulted Plantijn’s 1572 edition, in which the image is Table 1, Book 2; opposite page 56. The book was first published in Spanish in Rome in 1556, in Italian in 1560 and in Latin in Antwerp in 1566.
81 de Valverde’s draftsman, Gaspar Becerra (1520–1570), is said to have studied with Michelangelo in Rome. On the print, and the relationship of de Valverde’s illustrations to classical statues including the *Belvedere Torso*, traditionally identified as Hercules, see San Juan 2008. On the enduring relationship between the *Belvedere Torso* and Hercules in eighteenth-century artistic renderings, see Macsotay in this volume.
82 della Porta 1586, 2.34.

PHOTO © WELLCOME COLLECTION, CC BY 4.0 (HTTPS://CREATIVE COMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0), AVAILABLE AT HTTPS://WELLCOMECOLLECTION.ORG/WORKS/KWD3MW22 (ACCESSSED 05/08/2019)
Thus, seen through the lens of Vesalian anatomy, the lion’s hide in *The Great Hercules* (Figure 7.1) heightens the allusion to flayed skin produced by the treatment of the muscles. The hero’s hairy pelt seems both physically to belong to him, turning him into the Netherlandish lion rampant, and to be ripped from him into tatters, dramatically framing and exposing his face and torso.83 Whilst one fragment flutters upwards from his shoulder like a wing, others, rendered in flickering light with wavy lines rather than curved cross-hatching, glimmer like flames from his brawny right arm.

Hence *The Great Hercules* can not only be seen as a virile hero but also to intimate a traumatised figure annealed by butchery and fire *en route* to an ardently desired rebirth and rejuvenation. Understood as a body politic, it could have evoked the Netherlands’ recent experience of violence, in particular the siege and subsequent conflagration in Haarlem. A contemporary etching by

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83 Compare Michäel Eytzinger’s *Leo Belgica* (*The Belgian Lion*), 1583, the first of many maps in which The Netherlands are presented in the shape of a lion.
Frans Hogenberg (1535–1590) depicts the terrible suffering consequent upon the city’s surrender by means of multiple abject bodies (Figure 7.5). Described as ‘naked’ in the inscription, in the image the vulnerable bodies of these victims are juxtaposed to the hard, segmented armour of the victors. In April 1589, the year the print was published, Thomas Bodley (1545–1613), an English diplomat at the Hague, reported that the United Provinces were ‘weaker at this present than it hath been these many years; and unless by Her Majesty’s [Elizabeth I’s] extraordinary assistance and counsel it be presently holpen, there is little appearance that they can hold it out long.’ Yet there was also the possibility of resurrection and in retrospect, 1589 was a watershed. Israel states in his history of the Dutch Republic that:

84 Mielke 2009, 1.63 (B90).
85 As quoted by Israel 1995, 234, with reference to Wernham 1957, 450.
86 Israel 1995, 234.
In 1588, the United Provinces’ strategic situation seemed as precarious as ever. Yet, over the three years 1588–90, the outlook improved dramatically, a crucial transition for Dutch, and all European history. From being a divided enfeebled state, incapable of defending its territory, the Republic was transformed into a viable confederacy [...].

A body made monstrous and yet ultimately transmuted by burning also makes sense in relation to the artist, whose dominant hand had, according to Van Mander, been injured as the result of falling into a fire and being seared by boiling oil as a young child. Badly bound, the hand ended up deformed, ‘the sinews grew one into the other, so that he could throughout his life never properly open his hand’. Yet it was this tortured, inflexible hand that ultimately had the right shape and the strength to manipulate the burin in the heroic labour of producing prints such as The Great Hercules. In Van Mander’s biography of Goltzius, it is notable that the ‘evident signs of his identity’ that finally convinced a noble companion that the shabbily clad figure on the way to Naples was the renowned artist were the entwined lines of the H and G monogram on his handkerchief and this misshapen part of his body. The deformed hand is assumed to be depicted in two pen-works that reproduce his virtuoso engraving technique of forceful swelling and tapering lines (Figure 7.6). This metonymic self-portrait seems to inform the hands of the main figure of The Great Hercules, hands that hold the pustular club and Achelous’s amputated horn like engraver’s burins (Figure 7.1).

It is notable too that in Van Mander’s biography, Hendrick/Hercules’ apotheosis is often not far away from the presence of (and the desire for) physical

88 Hendrick Goltzius, The Artist’s Right Hand, Haarlem, Teylers Museum, pen and brown ink, 230 mm by 322 mm, inscribed with the artist’s name, including the HG monogram, and dated 1588 (Figure 7.6); Hendrick Goltzius, The Artist’s Right Hand, pen and brown ink, 245 mm by 340 mm, sold at Christies 10-07-2014, as discussed by Melion 1991, chapter 3, see esp. 59 and 168. The identification of the drawing with Goltzius’ own hand is rejected by Miedema 1994–1999, vol. 5, 180.
89 Goltzius inserted self-referential iconography relating to his damaged hand into his works. For example, in 1606 the pen-painting Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus (Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus freezes, Philadelphia Museum of Art), Goltzius himself is recognisable in the background, holding a burin, his right hand seemingly in the flames. See also the engraving of Gaius Mucius Scaevola, produced in the 1580s, in which the Roman hero proved his courage by unflinchingly placing his hand in a blazing fire: an example in the Print Room of the British Museum, London (1854.0513.95) is viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020.
labour and abject suffering; for example, directly after depicting the seated, young Hercules in Naples ‘he and his companions returned to Rome in the Papal galleys because Goltzius was eager to see the naked slaves rowing’.90 Previously, in Rome, because of the plague, ‘in the streets and public places, miserable sick people lay dying, also in some places near where Goltzius was busy drawing after antique statues; this did not stop him from realising his desires, despite the foul stench [...]’.91

2.3 At the Crossroads between Tradition and Modernity

_The Great Hercules_ was published at the threshold of the Dutch ‘Golden Age’, a period of unprecedented expansion in global trade, knowledge and exploitation, particularly in the distant West, the location of the garden of the Hes-

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perides. It is notable that explicit evidence of this new world, in the form of a tobacco plant, features in the lower left corner of the print. A contemporary woodcut of two warriors of the Tupinambá people from the Amazon region in Brazil demonstrates how the noble Hercules could migrate visually into this realm and become entangled with ‘the Barbarian’ and ‘the savage’ (Figure 7.7).

Following Donna Haraway’s injunction to ‘stay with the trouble(s)’, this chapter has abandoned the attempt to limit understanding of the print to the epistemology of an ‘enlightened’ world. Instead of trying to contain The Great Hercules within the strict confines of logic, the more liberal techniques of knowledge-production of the late-sixteenth century have allowed Hercules to incorporate both the macrocosm and the microcosm: the Netherlandish body politic exemplified by the city of Haarlem, and the individual artist Hendrick Goltzius, epitomised by his misshapen yet powerful hand. The heroic, masculine body has expanded to encompass not only an initial claim to authority and stability in the form of a monumental statue but also the mobility of a life-story punctuated by events and informed by choice. It has been suggested that, at this pivotal historical moment, the masculine subject was being required not only to decide between vice and virtue, conceived as fixed, binary opposites, but also to engage in a continual negotiation between different but related extremes. While the colossal statue looks backwards towards the monuments of an antique golden age, the progressing figure strives towards a dream of material fulfilment and spiritual immortality that justifies repeated trials of strength and brutal deeds along the way. As well as being a demi-god, The Great Hercules admits the possibility of being a laughable ‘Apple-sack’. As a flesh-and-blood human being he has been ravaged and deformed by physical labour and suffering as intense as, and entangled with, the cruelties he is dealing out to adversaries over land and sea. Indeed, the Latin inscription beneath

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92 Holman 1993, 400–401. This does not invalidate Holman’s suggestion that the medicinal properties of tobacco can be interpreted with reference to Goltzius restoration to health through his journey to Italy. The powers of a panacea such as tobacco were known as ‘virtues’.

93 de Léry 1578, 231. Cf. Gaudio 2008, ix–xi. See de Léry 1578, 230 (the page opposite to the woodcut) for the use of the terms ‘savage’ and ‘Barbarian’ and a description of the Tupinambá battle cries that is similar to the account of the battle hymn to Hercules and battle cries of the Germanic peoples in Tacitus, Germania 3. For the construction and circulation of de Léry’s image see Sloan 2007, 67–69, 227. For a Herculean presence in the depiction of colonisation, in Australia by Thomas Cleveley (1747–1809) and New Zealand by twenty-first-century artist Marian Maguire, see Dillon and Stafford respectively in Blanshaward and Stafford (eds) 2020.
**Figure 7.7** Two warriors of the Tupinambá people from the Amazon region of Brazil, woodcut from Jean de Léry, *Histoire d’un Voyage fait en la terre du Brésil autrement dite Amerique* (History of a voyage to Brazil, otherwise known as America), La Rochelle: Pour Antoine Chuppin 1578, 231. The British Library, London: 576.c.29. Photo © Joanna Woodall.
The Great Hercules seems to hint that this giant has not only conquered his alter-egos, Achelous and Antaeus, but also, through exposure in his labours to the three additional 'monsters' that are mentioned, somehow subsumed these 'others' into his own prodigious body: the poisonous and insatiable hydra, the fire-breathing, cannibal giant Cacus and the 'three bodied' hulk Geryon.\(^\text{94}\)

Consisting of both an inscription and an image, the print has thus been moved through and beyond iconography into a realm in which the very same lines, incised and inked by the artist and expressed onto the paper by the physical force of the mechanical press, not only describe a figure but constitute a multifarious, entangled, perplexing subject named Hercules.\(^\text{95}\) Yet in calling Hercules ‘virtue itself’, Van Mander specified ‘the honest, valiant heart [\textit{ghemoedt}], wisdom, reason and constancy that is in us, because no one shares in or attains these good characteristics without Divine grace, and the good inclinations of the heart [\textit{ghemoets}].’\(^\text{96}\) This chapter has demonstrated that The Great Hercules cannot be recognised as a figure of virtue if virtue is regarded solely as a fixed position, in contrast to its foreign other: vice. There is more mileage in the Aristotelian practice of constantly charting a line between excess on every side, the elusive golden mean that would still justify transcendent value.\(^\text{97}\) Goltzius was conscious of the pun between his name and the Dutch word for gold and ‘The Apple-sack of Goltzius’ can, after all, be seen to be engaged in the difficult, never-ending task of finding the proper path to attain the golden apples and the intangible ‘golden mean’.\(^\text{98}\) This potent meta-line would both describe and connect the realms of matter and spirit, passion and reason, barbarity and civility. According to Aristotelean ethics, virtue not as an

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95 Cf. Ingold 2007, 5: ‘what is a thing or indeed a person, if not a tying together of the lines – the paths of growth and movement – of all the many constituents gathered there?’
96 Van Mander 1634, fol. \textit{78r}–\textit{v}:
‘Soo dat Hercules niet en is anders als de deughtsaemheyt, het eerlijck cloeck ghemoedt, wijsheyt, redelijckheyt, en ghestadichheyt, die in ons is, om dat dese goede eyghenschappen niemant te deele en worden sonder de Godtlijcke goetheyt, en goede toegheneghenheyt des ghemoets […]’
97 Sachs no date.
98 The pun on Goltzius’ name is evident in a personal emblem drawn by Goltzius dated 1609. A laurel-crowned, classical bust representing Honour flies above a caduceus of Mercury, god of eloquence, the base of which is inserted into a pot of gold coins. The inscription \textit{‘Eer boven Golt’} means ‘Honour above Gold’. Drawing, pen and dark brown ink on cream laid paper, 150.8 mm by 89 mm, Crocker Art Museum, E.B. Crocker Collection, Sacramento, California, 1871.143; viewable online through a link from the Hercules Project website, Hercules Project 2020.
entity or even essence but as a continuing practice, habitus or path, could thus be sought and found even within monstrosity, as what might be termed the line of beauty. The philosopher and translator of Aristotle Joe Sachs emphasises: 99

... the intimate connection of beauty with the experience of wonder. The sense of wonder seems to be the way of seeing which allows things to appear as what they are, since it holds off our tendencies to make things fit into theories or opinions we already hold [...]. But this is what Aristotle says repeatedly is the ultimate effect of moral virtue, that the one who has it sees truly and judges rightly, since only to someone of good character do the things that are beautiful appear as they truly are [...]. It is only in the middle ground between habits of acting and between principles of action that the soul can allow right desire and right reason to make their appearance, as the direct and natural response of a free human being to the sight of the beautiful.

Hendrick Goltzius himself seems likely to have pursued a transcendent line within his monstrous, material creation. After all, Van Mander says that whilst drawing the great antique statues in Rome amongst the dead and dying victims of the plague, he ‘almost forgot himself because his spirit and mind were, as it were, abducted and taken away from his body through looking at the excellent works of art’. 100 However, while Goltzius aspired to approach the Angels in heaven, we remain down on earth, embodied beings in the midst of the trouble and arguably lacking the assistance of Divine grace. In its attempt to make sense of The Great Hercules, this chapter has responded to the aporia by opening up a path that has to divide, proceed in parallel, cross, spiral outwards, double back on itself and adopt other manoeuvres in negotiating between and bringing together a whole array of ‘extremes’. They include allegory and embodied experience, individual and community, monumentality and mobility, cruelty and suffering, physical labour and erudite rhetoric, nobility and boorishness, animality and civility, reverence for past achievements and progress towards future fulfilment – the list could go on. These abstract limits of masculinity

99 Sachs no date. On aporia and its role in early modern art, see Nagel and Pericolò 2010.

100 Van Mander 1604, fol. 283r. Miedema 1994–1999, 1.390 and 5.190. According to Gaudio 2008, 39, ‘[Goltzius] establishes a path of transcendence [...] in which the artist acknowledges the materiality of the scriptive instrument’s work even as he imagines a victorious end for that labour’.
have been linked together and given a specific character by a pivotal historical moment, Haarlem in 1589, but they remain logically different, even opposed.

In the supremely controlled marks that form *The Great Hercules*, incipient binary contradictions have been concealed, condensed and reconciled by the artist, the confusions and troubles to which they testify transformed into a graphic image that engenders in the viewer the endless task of perceiving ‘inherent’ virtue: the golden mean in the incised, inked line. Yet in addition to Hendrick’s personal identification with *Hercules Prodicius*, who makes his choice between earth and heaven, it is worth remembering that his old friend Van Mander stated that “Together, all these things that have been recounted prove Goltzius to be a rare Proteus or Vertumnus in Art, who like him can metamorphose into all ways of proceeding”.\(^\text{101}\) This chapter has suggested that in *The Great Hercules* Goltzius’ procedures involve hyperbole, disguise, deceit, displacement and comical inversion through knowing imitation. In my view it is not inherent virtue but this Art, the ongoing, astoundingly skilled, embodied practices of translation, mutation and transformation, which can still invest the figures of Hendrick Goltzius and *The Great Hercules* with the golden thread of *rhetorical* potency ascribed to the Gallic Hercules.\(^\text{102}\) Their virtue lies in the artful performance that can still provoke fruitful thought about masculinity on the threshold of modernity.

\(^{\text{101}}\) Van Mander 1634, fol. 285\(^*\), my translation:

“Al dees verhaelde dinghen t’samen bewijzen, Goltzium eenen seldsamen Proteus oft Vertumnus te wesen in de Const, met hem in alle ghestalten van handelinghen te connen herscheppen.”


\(^{\text{102}}\) See above, n. 51. In the edition of Andrea Alciato’s *Emblemata* published in Leiden in 1591, the Latin text of emblem CLXXX, ‘Eloquentia fortitudine praestantior’, reproduced in the Introduction to this volume (Figure 1.1), is translated:

“His left hand holds a bow, his right hand a stout club, the lion of Nemea clothes his bare body. So this is a figure of Hercules. But he is old and his temples grizzled with age – that does not fit. What of the fact that his tongue has light chains passing through it, which are attached to men’s pierced ears, and by them he draws them unresisting along? The reason is surely that the Gauls say that Alcaeus’ descendent excelled in eloquence rather than might and gave laws to the nations. – Weapons yield to the arts of peace, and even the hardest of hearts the skilled speaker can lead where he will.”
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