

CHASING CHIMAERAS

Of the various contests held by Aeneas to mark the anniversary of his father's death the ship-race (*Aen.* 5. 116–286) is marked out by its length and initial position as especially important. However its precise significance is by no means obvious. That Virgil intends it to have some relevance to events of later Roman history seems fairly clear. First, we are told the names of the families descended from three of the four captains involved – Cluentii, Memmii and Sergii. It seems therefore that we should look to the activities of members of these families to discover Virgil's intention. Two families – Cluentii and Memmii – are a mystery, since none of their members plays an obviously prominent role in the events of Virgil's own time. However, Sergestus and the Sergii point unmistakably towards Catiline.¹ Sergestus' rash folly, which is nearly the ruin of his men and his ship, exactly matches Catiline's own *furor*, which would have destroyed Rome. Even the name of his ship, Centaurus, reinforces the point.² A second pointer to the likelihood that the four ships have some significance for the distant future is the fact that the line in which Virgil initially refers to the ships as

quattuor ex omni delectae classe carinae (5. 115)

seems to be echoed in the reference to the ships saved from destruction in the ship-burning episode as

... omnes
quattuor amissis seruatae a peste carinae. (5. 698–9)

It thus seems that the four ships singled out in the initial contest of the games have as their counterparts the four ships lost in the near-disaster following the games, which are themselves destroyed by fire from the four altars dedicated to Neptune (5. 639–40). The burnt ships, as it transpires, are now unnecessary. They belong to the past.³ It seems possible that their counterparts, the four chosen ships taking part in the race, relate to the future.

The fourth of Virgil's captains, Gyas, stands out as the only one who is not said to be the founder of a later family.⁴ In character, however, he has something in common with Sergestus. As Sergestus comes to grief through *furor*, so Gyas destroys his chance of success through his own impetuosity. He deprives his ship of its steersman by throwing Menoetes overboard. Then, when the challenge of Mnesteus comes, Gyas cannot meet it. His ship

... cedit, quoniam spoliata magistro est. (5. 224)

Gyas fails because of the same heedlessness which brings disaster wherever it is found in the *Aeneid*.⁵ His defeat, therefore, fits well enough into the context of the poem.

¹ Servius ad *Aen.* 5. 121 *et inde est Sergius Catilina*.

² Nisbet–Hubbard, *Commentary on Horace Odes II* (Oxford, 1978), p. 188.

³ 'The ships are no longer necessary and hence ought to be destroyed as symbols of the past years of frustrated wandering' (M. C. J. Putnam: *The Poetry of the Aeneid* [Harvard, 1966], p. 91).

⁴ Although Servius (ad *Aen.* 5. 117) tells us that he is the ancestor of the Geganii Virgil's silence on the point can hardly be accidental.

⁵ E.g. *Aen.* 9. 314 ff. (Nisus and Euryalus) and 756–61 (Turnus in the Trojan camp).

Yet if Sergestus, who exhibits similar vices, points to a historical figure, may not Gyas do the same? Gyas' ship too, the huge 'Chimaera', is of interest. It is described in some detail whereas the rival ships receive only cursory descriptions. H. Mørland rightly argued⁶ that the stress on the size of the ship:

ingentemque Gyas ingenti mole Chimaeram,
urbis opus...

and on its three banks of oars:

triplici pubes quam Dardana uersu
impellunt, terno consurgunt ordine remi;

pointed to the huge, three-headed monster whose name it bore. He noted too that the name 'Gyas' was that of one of the gigantic Hesiodic Hundred-Handers and argued that in general in the passage describing the contenders in the ship-race 'Der Name des Besitzers, die Beschreibung und der Name des Schiffes sind in intimer Weise verbunden'. Thus the hugeness of Gyas' vessel and of the 'real' Chimaera itself was a pointer to the gigantic figure whose name was the same as that of the captain of the 'Chimaera'.⁷ Mørland, however, did not pursue the matter further. Yet it is precisely the fact that Gyas the Hundred-Hander may lie behind Virgil's ship-captain which seems to provide support for the view that the name 'Gyas' – whether referring to the ship-captain or to the Hundred-Hander – may conceal a historical figure.

A number of passages in Augustan literature appear to point to this conclusion. The most striking is Hor. *Od.* 2. 17. 13–15, where Horace protests his everlasting devotion to Maecenas in the face of even the gravest dangers.⁸

me nec Chimaerae spiritus igneae
nec, si resurgat, centimanus Gyas
diuellet umquam:

If this text were indubitably correct it would seem difficult, given the appearance of 'Gyas' and the Chimaera in both Horace and Virgil, to deny the possibility of a link between the two passages – even though 'Gyas' in Horace is the Hundred-Hander rather than a man. We might be tempted to think of some contemporary reality lying behind the disguise in the two passages. It would be less easy to accept Nisbet–Hubbard's view that Horace is 'evoking implausible fantasies' and 'teasing his patron for his ancestral superstitions',⁹ especially since Nisbet–Hubbard themselves note that real events may lie behind the mention of Libra, Scorpio and Capricorn in the next stanza¹⁰ and since Maecenas' escape from danger and Horace's escape from the tree, which conclude the poem, are real enough. Unfortunately the reading *Gyas* at *Od.* 2. 17. 14 is an emendation of Lambinus. The MSS offer *gigas*, supported by

⁶ H. Mørland, 'Nisus, Euryalus und andere Namen in der Aeneis', *S.O.* 33 (1957), 103 ff.

⁷ While accepting that the assimilation of the Virgilian captain to the *centimanus* is to some extent facilitated by the 'gigantic' context (possibly aided by the rather ambiguously positioned words *ingenti mole* at *Aen.* 5. 118) I feel that the primary purpose of the stress on the ship's size is to suggest the size of the original Chimaera.

⁸ A recent discussion of *Od.* 2. 17 notes that 'critics' difficulties with the ode have most often centred in the fourth to sixth stanzas' and that Horace's 'grandiloquence' (with regard to the Chimaera and Gyas) has 'subjected the poet to uneasy suspicions of a maudlin and obsequious lapse of taste' (Emily A. McDermott, 'Horace, Maecenas and Odes II 17', *Hermes* 110 (1982), 211–28).

⁹ N–H, ii. 278.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 281–2.

Priscian and pseudo-Acro. Muretus' emendation *Gyges* is favoured by Klingner, West¹¹ and Nisbet–Hubbard. The same problem arises at *Od.* 3. 4. 69:

testis mearum centimanus Gyas
sententiarum...

where again *gigas* is the MSS reading.

These two Horatian passages cannot be considered in isolation. A number of other passages in which the same Hundred-Hander seems to appear must be taken into account. When the name occurs in Hesiod, *Γύγης* is no doubt the form which should be adopted.¹² That, however, is not in itself a guarantee of the form in later literature.¹³ In the Hesiodic MSS themselves *Γύης* is very occasionally found as a variant. *Γύης* also appears to be the form attested in Apollodorus. In Latin texts variants based on *gi-* or *gy-* seem to be found occasionally beside *gyg-* and *gig-* forms,¹⁴ though it would be rash to claim much on the basis of these scattered occurrences. Nisbet–Hubbard suggest that *Gyges* was prone to corruption because of the unfamiliar scansion.¹⁵ That is perhaps the case. However, on grounds of sense alone it is hardly surprising that *gigas* should often appear as a variant whatever the correct text may be. It is not quite so easy to see why *gias* etc. should arise wrongly. West, following Welcker, observes that *Γύγης* may arise through association with *γυῖον*. If so, it is possible that the variant arose in the Alexandrian period and that – if indeed *Gyas* lies behind *gigas* of the Horatian MSS – Horace adopted it as being an appropriate name for one who was *centimanus*.

The possibility that *gigas* is in fact the correct reading in both Horatian passages should of course be considered. Nisbet–Hubbard suggest that *gigas* as a common noun deserves consideration and note that it 'might be combined with *Chimaerae* just as *belua centiceps* with *Eumenidum*' at *Od.* 2. 13. 34 ff.¹⁶ However, the two Horatian passages referring to the Hundred-Hander must be considered together with Ovid, *Am.* 2. 1. 12 and *Tr.* 4. 7. 17, in which the same individual seems to be mentioned. Again the MSS vary.¹⁷ However, the presence of the epithet *centimanus* in both passages suggests that Ovid has the Horatian Hundred-Hander in mind. In neither Ovidian passage is the acc. of *gigas* possible and in each case a proper name is required.¹⁸ It therefore seems difficult to defend *gigas* in either passage in Horace.

In view of the corruption in the Horatian MSS and the variants which occur in other relevant passages doubt must inevitably exist as to the correct form of the Hundred-Hander's name. A more fruitful approach to the problem of whether a link exists between the Virgilian captain of the Chimaera and Hor. *Od.* 2. 17. 13–14 may lie in an examination of various contexts in which the Hundred-Hander and the Chimaera occur in Augustan poetry to see whether a political significance is likely.

¹¹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. M. L. West (Oxford, 1966), p. 210, where many of the Greek and Latin passages in which the name occurs are cited.

¹² West loc. cit.

¹³ West, however, argues for the restitution of the *Γύγ-* and *Gyg-* forms in all the passages he quotes, including those in which forms without the second *γ* or *g* appear as variants.

¹⁴ Ovid, *Am.* 2. 1. 12 *gygen* (*gi-* ω) PS ω: *gigem* s: *gigan* HPa: *gigam* s: *giam* Heinsii Palatinus. Ovid, *Tr.* 4. 7. 18 *gian* G: *giam* P: *gygem* E: *gigem* DB: *gigam* CH (so André: Luck, however, reports *Gygan* G: *Gygam* P). Ovid, *Fast.* 4. 593 *gia* F: *gyge* UM: *gige* AXm: *giga* D. It is perhaps worth noting that Virgil's sea-captain has become *Gygas* in the ed. Micyll. of Hyginus (272. 15).

¹⁵ N–H, ii. 279.

¹⁶ Loc. cit.

¹⁷ See note 14 above.

¹⁸ At *Tr.* 4. 7. 17 context and metre alike rule it out. At *Am.* 2. 1. 12 a type of elision unparalleled for Ovid would result.

In *Od.* 3. 4 the political implications of the Gigantomachy are widely accepted. Actium is the reality behind the rout of the Giants. With the words

uis consili expers mole ruit sua:
uim temperatam di quoque prouehunt
in maius; (65–7)

Horace points the moral. The next words

idem odere uiris
omne nefas animo mouentis.

make a slightly different moral point which is proved by the examples of the Hundred-Hander and Orion, who are followed in the concluding stanza by Tityus and Pirithous. The last three are explicitly said to be punished for their lechery, and the allusion to Antony is plain.¹⁹ It would be incredible if the Hundred-Hander were the only one of the four to be picked at random. He too must have some contemporary relevance.

That *Od.* 2. 17. 17–20 may refer to historical events has already been mentioned. These events are concerned with the civil war. Maecenas' escape from danger is often assumed to refer to his recovery from illness. However, a political context is at least as likely, and the balance between piety and impiety which is an important part of the poem points in this direction. Horace, as a poet, is *pious* and so is saved by Faunus from the danger of the falling tree (planted in *Od.* 2. 13 by an impious criminal). So too Maecenas is saved from the baleful influence of *impius Saturnus* because of *Iouis tutela*.²⁰ Horace's point here may be similar to the one he makes in *Od.* 3. 4, i.e. both Horace and Augustus and his ministers are alike protected from danger by their *pietas*. Horace's *pietas* is shown in the fact that he practises the craft of poetry. That of Augustus and Maecenas is shown in their public careers.

Finally Ovid, *Am.* 2. 1 may be considered. The poet's planned epic on

... caelestia ... bella
centimanumque Gyn...

is cut short because his mistress bars her door. The re-fashioning of the *recusatio* motif is obvious. In such contexts, however, the grandiose themes which are rejected are regularly exemplified not only by hackneyed myths but also by *laudes Caesaris*. Thus the use of the Gigantomachy in a *recusatio* context reinforces the likelihood that here, as often elsewhere, it has political undertones.

'Gyas', then, – if that is his name – is clearly allegorical in *Od.* 3. 4 and may well be allegorical in Ovid, *Am.* 2. 1. If he also had political significance in *Od.* 2. 17 he would fit well into what appears to be the context of the poem. Here, however, he is accompanied by the Chimaera, and we should now turn to consider whether it too can be credibly seen as having some allegorical significance in Augustan literature.

¹⁹ For Antony as a reckless lover see esp. J. Griffin, 'Propertius and Antony', *JRS* 67 (1977), 17–26.

²⁰ I would take it that, beneath the surface astrology, *Iouis* points to Augustus and that the opposition between Jupiter and Saturn here has the same kind of implication that may exist in *Od.* 2. 12. 6 ff., where N–H comment (p. 191) 'Horace may be suggesting an attempt to restore the *ancien régime*...'. For doubts on the idea that an illness of Maecenas lies behind *Od.* 2. 17 see Y. Nadeau, 'Speaking Structures' (Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History II, ed. Deroux: coll. Latomus vol. 168), p. 218. Dr Nadeau suggests to me that vv. 22–6 may refer to the conspiracy of Lepidus.

Two passages are relevant to the possible significance of the Chimaera. At *Aen.* 8. 785 Virgil describes Turnus' helmet:

cui triplici crinita iuba galea alta Chimaeram
sustinet Aetnaeos efflantem faucibus ignes:
tam magis illa fremens et tristibus effera flammis
quam magis effuso crudescunt sanguine pugnae.

The symbolic nature of this device is apparent. It represents Turnus' uncontrolled blood-lust, the vice which distinguishes him from Aeneas. Virgil describes the helmet as 'lofty' (*alta*) and 'with a triple crest'. These details, like the size and three-banked oars of Gyas' ship, recall the appearance of the Chimaera itself. Clearly Turnus, Aeneas' chief opponent in the war in Latium, is intended to some extent to remind Virgil's readers of Antony. May not Gyas in the ship-race, a man who shares Turnus' recklessness and is also, like him, associated with the Chimaera, represent a minor, less serious version of Antony?

The second passage in which the Chimaera may carry allegorical overtones is Hor. *Od.* 4. 2. 13 ff. Horace lists the genres in which Pindar excels. These include hymns and encomia:

seu deos regesque canit, deorum
sanguinem, per quos cecidere iusta
morte Centauri, cecidit tremendae
flamma Chimaerae (13–16)

Although, however, the poem begins with a laudatory description of Pindar's style and an acknowledgement that he is inimitable, its main subject is the praise of Augustus. Formally the task of composing a Pindaric encomium is entrusted to Iullus Antonius – Horace will offer a humbler tribute. Yet this Horatian *recusatio* can hardly be taken at face value. The length and Pindaric character of the passage devoted to a description of Pindar's poetry as well as the Pindarising character of other poems in Book IV make it plain that the genres mentioned are not simply to be regarded as specimens of the types of writing which Horace declines to attempt. Rather some connection should be sought between these genres and the major ideas of the rest of the poem or of Book IV as a whole. Thus the dithyrambs of vv. 10–12 are to be connected with the triumph of vv. 49 ff.²¹ The idea expressed in vv. 17–20 that poetry is a better gift than statues is taken up in 4. 8. The ability of poetry to confer immortality (vv. 21–4) is the theme of 4. 9. It is not hard to see an Augustan significance behind vv. 13–16. The deeds of 'offspring of the gods' point to Augustus himself as does the stress on the 'just death' of the victims. Here the Chimaera is in the company of Centaurs and there seems an obvious link with the two ships which fail disastrously in Virgil's ship-race. The opponents of Augustus also came to grief and perished *iusta morte*.

It thus seems reasonable to see Virgil's ship-race as making a political point. It is also reasonable to see the Hundred-Hander and the Chimaera as having political significance in several passages. Since the point being made in the ship-race is in fact the same as that which Horace makes in *Od.* 3. 4, I believe that a good case can be made for Gyas as being the name of the Hundred-Hander in Horace. Horace declares that *uis consili expers mole ruit sua*. Virgil's Gyas, by throwing Menoetes overboard, deprives his ship of a steersman – and it is because of this that he loses the race. Although Virgil does not explicitly say that the great size of 'Chimaera' contributes

²¹ F. J. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1972), pp. 95–97.

to Gyas' failure it is a reasonable inference in the light of his comment that Cloanthus' ship, though manned by better oarsmen, is slowed down by its weight (vv. 152–4). Horace also claims that *uim temperatam di quoque prouehunt in maius*. This is paralleled by the success of Cloanthus in the race. After demonstrating his piety by prayer to the sea gods he finds his ship pushed to victory by the god Portunus.

As often, it is difficult to know how far to press the allegory. It seems probable that Gyas – whether Hundred-Hander or sea-captain – may be intended to reflect Antony in the passages we have considered.²² The Chimaera is harder. In *Aen.* 7 it is Turnus' symbol. Therefore it is perhaps unlikely to reflect an individual. It is more likely to denote the spirit of madness which ruins those infected with it.²³ Gyas' ship was huge – *urbis opus*. Is it possible that this puzzling phrase is to be taken literally, that Gyas' control – or lack of control – of his ship is intended to suggest how Antony would have ruined Rome? He would have destroyed the state, just as his counterpart in the games nearly destroyed his ship – *oblitus decorisque sui sociumque salutis* (5. 174).²⁴

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²² The Hundred-Hander's name may again be applied as a term of abuse in public life at S.H.A. 19. 8. *5 sed inter has uirtutes tam crudelis fuit ut illum alii Cyclopem, alii Busirem... multi Typhona uel Giganta uocarent*. For *Giganta* P gives *gigantam* and Σ *gigem*. (On the controversy as to the value of Σ see P. K. Marshall in *Texts and Transmission*, ed. Reynolds (Oxford, 1983), p. 355. He suggests that the view that the readings of Σ are the product of humanist conjecture may possibly yet prove to be basically correct.) Atrocities are evidently thought typical of the Hundred-Hander at Ovid, *Fast.* 4. 593.

²³ For a possible (much later) example of the killing of the Chimaera as a symbol of the victory of Good over Evil see J. M. C. Toynbee, *JRS* 54 (1964), 6–14. It is tempting, though I think probably wrong, to equate the Chimaera with Cleopatra. (For the Chimaera as an image applied to a *meretrix* see N–H, i. 317.)

²⁴ One reason given for Antony's failure at Actium was his huge and cumbersome ships (Plut. *Ant.* 66. 1–2; Dio 50. 23. 2 and 50. 33. 8). I am doubtful whether this is relevant here – even though both Plutarch and Dio liken the attacks on Antony's ships to the besieging of cities. Sergestus' presence shows that the race itself cannot correspond *tout court* to Actium. In any case, although 'Chimaera' is a ship name here the appearance of the monster on Turnus' helmet suggests that it is not the link with a *ship* which is the important point. Virgil probably stresses size in both Chimaera passages partly for the same reason as Ovid does in his description of Python (*Met.* 1. 440 and 459), i.e. such monsters *are* huge and victory over them is thereby the greater. (For the political implications in Ovid's Python story see my article in *CQ* n.s. 30 (1980), 181.) Virgil is surely making a moral or political point rather than commenting on naval strategy.