Similar points can be made about the *laudes Italiae* in book two of the *Georgics* (136–76), which begins with an outbidding *synkrisis* of Italy with various lands of the east. Straightforward hyperbolical *auxēsis* is found in such details as the statement that the land 'flows with gold' (166). In the description of Italy as a land of perpetual spring (149) we have straightforward hyperbole, but also an allusion to a separate frame of reference, the myth of the Isles of the Blest, which leads naturally enough into the hint of the mythical Golden Age in the lines emphasizing the absence of harmful fauna and flora.

Hyperbole and encomium may also be compared with respect to their relationship to allegory; like hyperbole, an encomiastic expression may be an isolated occurrence, but more often it is part of a larger conceptual framework, particularly the ideology of kingship, in which the person of the ruler is made the centre of an extensive network of ideas which typically finds expression in the political allegory of the masque, pageant, and panegyric. In formal terms the sustained encomiastic *synkrisis* stands in the same relationship to the isolated simile as continuous allegory to the simple metaphor.[58]

Explicitly panegyrical passages are frequent in the *Aeneid*, usually conveyed in the words of one of the actors, but sometimes presented directly by the author; they are naturally associated with hyperbole. One of the most hyperbolical episodes in the poem is the fight between Hercules and Cacus, analysed in chapter 3 in terms of the underlying Gigantomachic allegory; the hyperbole here serves a number of purposes, including that of praise. The narrative is closely connected to the hymn to Hercules that follows,[59] which is presented as a panegyric of Hercules (*Aen.* 8.287 f.):

> hic iuvenum chorus, ille senum, qui carmine *laudes*
> *Herculeas et facta* ferunt.

The slaying of Cacus is presented as the continuation and climax of the other deeds praised in the hymn (303 f.). Within the hymn itself there is the striking hyperbole of *mille labores* at line 291, an amplification of the canonical twelve labours carried out in the service of Eurystheus; the use of large numbers, frequently where the literary model has a much smaller figure, is typically Virgilian. Encomiastic *topoi* are concentrated in the prophetic passages of the *Aeneid*, naturally enough, since the central objects of praise are not identical with the central subject-matter of the poem but may be directly alluded to in prophecies that look beyond the temporal limits of the legendary action; the *topoi* are set out programmatically in the speech of Jupiter in book one, an encomiastic and hyperbolical prophecy of the future achievements of Rome, first in war and then in peace. In chapter 7 I indicate how the main topographical features of the *cosmos* are laid out here; reflection on this leads to an understanding of the way in which Virgil uses the static counters of encomium to articulate the epic narrative; the spatial (and temporal) co-ordinates of encomium are re-utilized as the points along which the trajectory of the continuous history is plotted.

[58] See above, pp. 213 f., for a *synkrisis* of Epicurus with Hercules that is close to allegory.

[59] See above, p. 215.

(b) Hyperbole: myth to legend. Mythical monsters in *Aeneid* 3

A rich source of hyperbole is the comparison of real events in the natural or human worlds with the supernatural events of myth. A recurrent form of this in the *Aeneid* is the use of Gigantomachic allusion, where the myths referred to are not, for the most part, given explicit expression. The process may be even more clearly observed in the parallelism between mythical events actually narrated in the course of the poem and historical (or legendary) events narrated elsewhere in the poem. The main opportunity for the introduction of supernatural mythical events is of course the reworking of the adventures of Odysseus in book three.

It is during the last stages of his 'Odyssean' wanderings, as narrated to Dido, that Aeneas confronts his most dangerous and marvellous ordeals: geographical monstrosities by sea and land, the mythical Charybdis and the real-life Etna, and the anthropomorphic monster Polyphemus. These are all located in or near Sicily, traditionally the home of wonders,[60] an island

[60] Cf. esp. the list of *miranda* at Lucr. 1.717 ff.

violently sundered from the mainland in ages past,[61] and something of a big game reserve for primitive monsters. Charybdis, Etna, and Polyphemus form a closely-cohering group of hyperbolical descriptions, with the extended narrative of Polyphemus as the climax; in Aeneas' relation of his adventures in books two and three they act as a grand finale, followed only by an elliptical account of the remainder of Aeneas' journey to Carthage. One should not overlook the effect of such a climax on the listening Dido.[62] This compositional and psychological decorum has not prevented commentators from expressing serious unease about the relevance of this grandiose reworking of the Homeric material to the broader themes of the poem; yet again recourse is had to the consolation that it would have disappeared, or at least been much toned down, in the final revision.[63] The Achaemenides passage, in particular, is spirited out of the hypothetical final plan of the poet.[64] In what follows I wish to show at least that the hyperbole at the end of book three is not totally different from what Aeneas encounters elsewhere.

[61] *Aen.* 3.414 ff.

[62] One might compare the effect of Othello's fairy-tales on Desdemona.

[63] This point of view is clearly put by R. D. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Tertius* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 17 f. Favorinus (ap. Aul. Gell. *NA* 17.10) considered that Virgil's description of Etna was much in need of revision: *NA* 17.10.8 'ciusmodi sententias et verba molitus est, ut Pindaro quoque ipso, qui nimis opima pinguique esse facundia existimatus est, insolentior hoc quidem in loco tumidiorque sit'; ibid. 16 'quod ait "sidera lambit", vacanter hoc etiam . . . accumulavit et inaniter'.

[64] Cf. Williams on *Aen.* 3.588 f., describing the episode as 'a stitched-on piece of brilliant colours. It is a passage of rhetorical and grandiose writing, detached from the immediate world of human experience and capable of being handled in sonorous and grandiloquent hyperbole. This was the kind of writing which the Silver Age loved.' According to Williams 'the very marked similarities between Achaemenides and Sinon . . . suggest that when Virgil was writing the second book he used this passage as a quarry, intending to recast or remove it later on'. There is an important point of principle here: should such internal repetitions be used as evidence in the reconstruction of the genesis of the poem, or should they be used in the critical analysis of thematic structure? Recent studies have (I think correctly) laid increasing emphasis on the synchronic approach. In this particular instance I go no further than noting the obvious fact that the parallel stories of the Greeks Sinon and Achaemenides frame the whole of Aeneas' narrative to Dido.

i. Charybdis and the storm in Aeneid *1*

> laevum implacata Charybdis
> obsidet, atque imo barathri ter gurgite vastos
> sorbet in abruptum fluctus rursusque sub auras
> erigit alternos, et sidera verberat unda.
>
> (*Aen.* 3.420–3)

> tollimur in caelum curvato gurgite, et idem
> subducta ad Manis imos desedimus unda.
> ter scopuli clamorem inter cava saxa dedere,
> ter spumam elisam et rorantia vidimus astra.
>
> (*Aen.* 3.564–7)

Both in the instructions of Helenus and then in the first-hand experience of Aeneas Charybdis is presented hyperbolically as a monster who invades the whole length of the vertical axis of the universe in her alternate rise and fall. The description is based on the Homeric Charybdis (*Od.* 12.235 ff.), whose extreme territorial limits, however, are the top of the two peaks that tower above Charybdis and Scylla (238 f.)[65] and the sandy sea-bed (242 f.). In Virgil the limits are the Underworld below,[66] and the stars of heaven above. Both descriptions end with the watery lashing or splashing of the stars, which should be taken at face value. Williams[67] is right to reject Conington's attempt at a naturalistic rationalization of the much criticized *rorantia vidimus astra* (567),[68] but wrong to take *astra* in the weakened sense of 'sky'. Realism should not be expected after the mention of the Underworld two lines earlier. The point is the unnatural mingling of the water of the sea with the fiery stars, a confusion of the elements found in less extreme form in Homer's detail of earth appearing when Charybdis sucks in the waters of the sea (*Od.* 12.242). The chaos is theological as well as cosmological: Charybdis falls into the pattern of the Gigantomachic assault

[65] Though Virgil is given some licence by the fact that we have earlier (*Od.* 12.73) been told that the peak of Scylla reaches to the οὐρανός.

[66] Forcibly in *Manis* (565), and obliquely in *barathri* (421), which is often applied to the Underworld (e.g. *Aen.* 8.245).

[67] On 567.

[68] Heyne's comment is typical of modern reaction: 'probasse videtur saeculi Augustei genius. Nostris hominibus vix placeant!'

on heaven, and this suits other details of her myth. She is a daughter of *Terra*, and was struck by Jupiter's thunderbolt and hurled into the sea for stealing the cattle of Hercules.[69]

The extravagance of the Virgilian hyperbole emerges both when set against the Homeric model and against a Hellenistic epic description of the vast rise and fall of another supernatural geographical feature, the Wandering Rocks, in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.943 ff.):

> ἀμφὶ δὲ κῦμα
> λάβρον ἀειρόμενον πέτραις ἐπικαχλάζεσκεν,
> αἵ θ' ὁτὲ μὲν κρημνοῖς ἐναλίγκιαι ἠέρι κῦρον,
> ἄλλοτε δὲ βρύχιαι νεάτῳ ὑπὸ πυθμένι πόντου
> ἠρήρειν.

On both sides a mighty wave reared itself and crashed on the rocks, which now rose up into the air like cliffs, and now plunged down to rest in the lowest depth of the sea.[70]

Here there is no real threat to either the cosmological or the theological orders.

The moralized hyperbole of the Virgilian Charybdis is also found in the storm of book one, which is presented as a natural event (a violent storm), and perceived by the Trojans as such, but with supernatural causation circumstantially presented to the reader. This scene works on many levels at once, and hyperbole links the surface level of realistic epic narrative with the mythical and ideological levels to which it alludes; the Gigantomachic allegory fits easily with the use of features drawn from the Homeric and Virgilian Charybdis. The elemental confusion caused by the storm, which is analysed in greater detail in chapter 3, also threatens order along the vertical axis: the violence of the storm raises the waters of the sea to the fires of heaven (1.103);[71] the ships are alternately tossed up and down, but here no lower than the unnatural depth of the Homeric Charybdis. Compare *Aeneid* 1.106 f.:

> his unda dehiscens
> terram inter fluctus aperit, furit aestus harenis.

with Odyssey 12.242 f.:

> ὑπένερθε δὲ γαῖα φάνεσκε
> ψάμμῳ κυανέῃ.

Down below appeared earth with dark-blue sand.

The full proportions of the threat posed by the storm in book one to the universe are brought out only in the framing passages, which show events on the divine level; this may be seen as a partial concession to realism.

[69] Serv. ad *Aen.* 3.420. Her theft of Hercules' cattle also aligns her with another of Virgil's Gigantomachic figures, Cacus.

[70] On the text and interpretation see F. Vian, *Apollonios de Rhodos: Argonautiques IV* (Paris, 1981), pp. 45 f., 180.

[71] Another sky-reaching wave is found in Eur. *Hipp.* 1206 ff. ἱερὸν εἶδομεν / κῦμ' οὐρανῷ στηρίζον, ὥστ' ἀφῃρέθη / Σκίρωνος ἀκτὰς ὄμμα τοὐμὸν εἰσορᾶν, which of course is a miraculous breach in the natural order. With the last clause compare *Aen.* 1.88 f. 'eripiunt subito nubes caelumque diemque / Teucrorum ex oculis'.

ii. Etna

Charybdis escaped and harbour safely entered, the horrors continue with Etna. The *ecphrasis* of Etna was a notorious set-piece in antiquity;[72] I wish to emphasize the way in which Virgil exploits an extreme use of hyperbole in the service of an implicit moralization; for this too there was precedent, notably in Pindar's use of Etna as a political and moral symbol.[73] Hyperbole here links a natural phenomenon, Etna, to a theological concept, the threat of the destruction of the *cosmos*, which in turn is linked to a traditional mythological explanation of the volcano in the figure of Enceladus.

Etna, like Charybdis, assaults the heavens:

> atram prorumpit ad aethera nubem (*Aen.* 3.572)
> attollitque globos flammarum et sidera lambit. (574)[74]

This assault disturbs the natural order of things; the bright *aether* is no place for dark clouds, properly at home in the *aer*.[75] There is something of the paradoxical, too, in the words *liquefacta saxa* (576), since rocks are normally the type of solidity.

[72] See Williams on 3.571 f.

[73] *Pyth.* 1.13 ff., but this falls short of the Virgilian hyperbole. See above, p. 86.

[74] Cf. Lucr. 5.396 'ignis enim superat et lambens multa perussit', in the context of a myth (Phaethon) of cosmic disruption.

[75] The confusion of light and dark was one of the points criticized by the excessively logical Favorinus (Aul. Gell. *NA* 17.10.17 f.); cf. *Aen.* 8.254 f. (Cacus) 'glomeratque sub antro / fumiferam noctem commixtis igne tenebris'.

There is a similar confusion in the chaotic storm of book one in the words *praeruptus aquae mons* (1.105), where it is liquid that betrays its normal character.[76] As well as physical disturbance there is theological disturbance. The flames are, after all, sent up by the vanquished enemy of the gods, Enceladus; the fire lit by the thunderbolt that struck him down (*fulmine*, 578) licks the stars as a recurrent gesture of defiance. Note the use of *tonat* in the first line of the *ecphrasis*: taken with the rest of the passage there is a hint that the weapon of Jupiter is used against him,[77] a conceit developed powerfully by Lucretius in his description of Etna, with its Gigantomachic overtones (1.722 ff.).[78]

iii. Polyphemus

It should by now be clear that the conceptual structures behind the hyperbolical description of Etna recur repeatedly within the poem; this is not an isolated purple passage. The echoes of the moralized volcano begin almost immediately.[79] Within the *ecphrasis* itself there is a subtle transition to the mythological picture of Enceladus (578 ff.) by way of an anthropomorphized description of the eruptions (575 ff.):

> interdum scopulos avulsaque *viscera* montis
> erigit *eructans*, liquefactaque saxa sub auras
> cum *gemitu* glomerat fundoque exaestuat imo.

For the general idea of an anthropomorphic mountain one may compare the picture of Atlas in book four. In the description of the third, and last, monster of book three, Polyphemus, the terms of the comparison of mountain to man are reversed, so that the (already monstrous) anthropomorphic creature is described in language just applied to the volcano. Like Etna (or Enceladus), Polyphemus lies back and vomits (631 ff.):

[76] See above, pp. 108 f.

[77] Note *Aen.* 8.419 'antra Aetnaea *tonant*', in the making of the thunderbolt.

[78] See above, pp. 211 f. Cf. *Geo.* 1.471 ff., Etna erupting as a natural disturbance in sympathy with disturbance in the moral universe.

[79] The volcanic aspects of Allecto, Turnus, and Cacus, are examined briefly by F. A. Sullivan, 'Volcanoes and volcanic characters in Virgil', *CPh* 67 (1972), 186–91; he does not discuss the volcanic character of Polyphemus. For speculation on Polyphemus as in origin a volcanic demon, see R. Hennig, 'Altgriechische Sagengestalten als Personifikation von Erdfeuern und vulkanischen Vorgängen', *JDAI* 54 (1939), 230–46, esp. 240 f.

> iacuitque per antrum
> immensus saniem *eructans* et frusta cruento
> per somnum commixta mero.

The *viscera* (622) that he vomits up are, however, quite literal.

When Enceladus turns on his side, the resulting volcanic activity disturbs land and sky (581 f.):

> intremere omnem
> murmure Trinacriam et caelum subtexere fumo.

The great shout of Polyphemus also has far-reaching effects, this time on the divisions of sea and land (672 ff.):

> clamorem immensum tollit, quo pontus et omnes
> intremuere undae, penitusque exterrita tellus
> Italiae curvisque immugiit Aetna cavernis.[80]

The last words bring us back explicitly to the prison-house of Enceladus, inviting comparison between the monstrous effects of the two giants.

Finally, Polyphemus, like Charybdis and Etna, is a monster who assaults the sky (619 f.):

> ipse arduus, altaque pulsat
> sidera (di talem terris avertite pestem!).

The sky-reaching hyperbole is picked up again in the description of the massed assembly of Cyclopes who come in answer to his shout (678):

> Aetnaeos fratres[81] caelo capita alta ferentis.

Again note the association with Etna in the hyperbolical context.

The Sicilian monsters present a purely external threat to Aeneas; like Odysseus he is concerned only for physical safety through escape. The monsters themselves are presented as threats to a universal cosmological and theological order, but at this stage Aeneas has not realized his role as champion of cosmic order. The situation is different when he reaches Italy; resistance, not escape, is demanded of him, and his struggles

[80] Cf. the effects of Allecto's horn, 7.514 ff., and the universal effects of the words of Jupiter, 10.101 ff.

[81] *Aetnaeos fratres* might also mean literally 'brothers of Etna', according to the frequent poetic use of a personal adjective for a genitive (see Austin on *Aen.* 2.543).

are the necessary preliminary for the foundation of Roman, and hence universal, order. The fairy-tale monsters of book three are reincarnated in beings who directly challenge the foundation of Rome; it is only now that the cosmological and theological aspects of Etna and Polyphemus reveal their full significance for the workings of Roman prehistory and history. This process may be seen clearly in the case of two gigantic adversaries, Cacus and Mezentius.

Cacus is the enemy of Hercules, who is a symbol of the heroic qualities needed to establish Roman power. Cacus has obvious points in common with Polyphemus: his dark cave, his gory cannibalism. He is also comparable to the volcano Etna, in his fire-vomiting; the hyperbole here falls under the heading of the transition from the natural to the anthropomorphic levels. Finally, his defeat is elevated to the grandest cosmic level in the shock-waves that reach to the sky (*quo maximus intonat aether*, 8.239), followed by the hyperbolical simile equating him with a presiding spirit of Hades.[82]

Cacus can be only obliquely understood as an enemy of Aeneas; the Trojan meets his own Italian Polyphemus in the shape of the Etruscan Mezentius. The detailed resemblances, which fall into the general category of hyperbole by passage from the mythical to the legendary, have been collected in an article by J. Glenn.[83]

The impiety of Mezentius matches that of the Homeric Cyclops;[84] his atrocities recall the words Virgil uses to describe the cannibalism of Polyphemus.[85] The resemblance is concentrated above all in the simile comparing Mezentius to the giant Orion, who strides through the water, like Polyphemus in pursuit of the Trojan ships; like the Cyclops, Orion comes from the high mountains[86] with a tree-trunk for his staff; he too is a son of Poseidon, whose head reaches the sky, and he too is blinded. Both Mezentius and Polyphemus wield a *pinus*;[87] both hurl

[82] For further discussion of these points see above, pp. 110 ff.

[83] 'Mezentius and Polyphemus', *AJPh* 92 (1971), 129–55. See also A. La Penna, 'Mezenzio: una tragedia della tirannia e del titanismo antico', *Maia* 32 (1980), 3–30, esp. 13 ff.; La Penna accepts the parallels with Polyphemus, but rejects any symbolical interpretation.

[84] Polyphemus as *contemptor divum*: *Od.* 9.273 ff.

[85] Cf. *Aen.* 3.623 ff. with 8.485 ff.

[86] 3.655 'summo . . . monte'; 10.766 'summis . . . montibus'.

[87] 3.659; 9.522.

enormous rocks.[88] Both are *horrendus*,[89] and to both the word *moles* is applied.[90] Are we to conclude that the Polyphemus passage is then a 'quarry' for the description of Mezentius, an irrelevance which Virgil would eventually have expunged from the poem? Surely it is more satisfactory to understand the Polyphemus episode as a kind of baseline for the interpretation of the encounter between Aeneas and Mezentius: Mezentius is an Italian monster who must be removed if the human world of Rome is to develop freely, a moral perversion whose continued existence is an intolerable threat to the *Lebensraum* of the ancestors of the Roman race, even if his destruction is not untinged with regret, a melancholy itself based on the parallelism with Polyphemus: Mezentius also loses the 'light' of his life, his son,[91] and can console himself only with the company of an animal, his horse, as the Homeric Polyphemus has only his ram to talk to.[92]

(c) 'Theological space': the vertical axis. A hyperbolical reading of *Aeneid* 4

Hyperbole deals in extremes, and not the least important are the extremes of space on the vertical and horizontal axes. Housman observes that Virgil 'soars too near the stars';[93] in this section I shall argue that when he does it is not to be taken as a reckless joy-flight, but as part of a sustained exploration of the ultimate limits, both up and down, of the universe; the

[88] *Od.* 9.481; *Aen.* 10.698 f.

[89] 3.658; 9.521.

[90] 3.656; 10.771.

[91] Mezentius comes to wash his wounds in water after the death of his son (but before he is aware of it; does an awareness of the Polypheman model make the fact of his loss more poignant for us?), 10.833 ff., as Polyphemus comes to the sea to bathe his eye-socket after the loss of his eye; when he does see Lausus' body, his desire is to abandon *lux*, 855 f. The summary of the *Odyssey* at the head of the codex Palatinus preserves a Euhemerizing allegorization of the Polyphemus story, in which the single eye is to be understood as his daughter, his *only child*, whom Odysseus, consumed by the fire of love, takes away (G. Dindorf, *Scholia graeca in Homeri Odysseam* i (Oxford, 1855), pp. 4 f.). Is this just coincidence? How old is the allegorization? Note also that the phrase *lumen ademptum* (*Aen.* 3.658) used of the blinded Polyphemus is used by Catullus in a context of family bereavement, 68.93 (see J. Glenn, 'The blinded Cyclops: *lumen ademptum* (*Aen.* 3.658)', *CPh* 69 (1974), 37–8).

[92] Cf. *Aen.* 3.660 f. 'lanigerae comitantur oves; ea sola voluptas / solamenque mali' with 10.858 f. 'equum duci iubet, hoc decus illi, / hoc solamen erat'.

[93] *Classical papers*, p. 348.