

Closure and the Book of Virgil

Theodorakopoulos, Elena

DOI:

[10.1017/9781316756102.016](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316756102.016)

License:

Other (please specify with Rights Statement)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Theodorakopoulos, E 2019, Closure and the Book of Virgil. in C Martindale & F Mac Gorain (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. 2nd edn, Cambridge Companions to Literature, Cambridge University Press, pp. 226-240. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316756102.016>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

"This material has been published in The Cambridge Companion to Virgil edited by Charles Martindale and Fiachra Mac Gorain. This version is free to view and download for personal use only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © Cambridge University Press."

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Closure and the Book of Virgil

Elena Theodorakopoulos

When this chapter first appeared I had been struck by Laurence Lipking's suggestion in *The Life of the Poet* (1981) that Virgil's three canonical works, the *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*, should be seen as his *cursus honorum* and that 'together they complete a wheel or pattern'.¹ Two decades later, a whole new branch of literary criticism concerned with poetic careers has grown out of Lipking's work, and that of Richard Helgerson.² When Lipking began *The Life of the Poet* with the words 'We have heard too much about the lives of the poets', he was alerting us to the way in which biographical criticism often distracts from the close study of a poet's work. It is important therefore to note here that career criticism is not biographical criticism. Where the latter views biographical and historical context as the key to understanding an author's works, career criticism interprets 'life' to mean the complete shape of the author's existence, and then goes about taking a holistic view of the total *oeuvre*. Lipking's claim is that taking 'in the full career will also illuminate the details of any particular text'.³ For career critics the person of the author in his or her historical context is of interest to the extent that it is shaped into his or her works.⁴ Taking their lead from Helgerson and Lipking the two edited volumes on the subject of career criticism both give a central role to Virgil as the poet who, as Lipking had put it 'supplied the pattern of a career to so many later poets'.⁵

The tripartite pattern of Virgil's career was formalised in the *rota Vergilii*, or Wheel of Virgil, by John of Garland in the thirteenth century – a key image for both poets interested in building careers, and for modern career critics.⁶ In the *rota* the triadic career is pictured in the form of concentric circles; I think of it as a quasi-cosmic image, in which the texts of Virgil come to stand for all possible forms of human life and expression. But the origins of the triadic structure of the wheel can be found in what might be viewed as an early version of career criticism: the Virgilian biographies

¹Lipking (1981) 77.

²Lipking (1981) and Helgerson (1983). See Cheney (2002) 3-14 for a summary of the development of career criticism and discussion of the idea of a literary career. See Hardie and Moore (2010) 1-14 for Roman literary careers.

³Lipking (2010) 299.

⁴See Cheney (2002) 6; Hardie and Moore (2010) 1. Although I write 'they' and 'his or her', there are serious questions to be asked about the inherently male pattern imposed by the *cursus honorum* model. See Hardie and Moore (2010) 10 and n.15.

⁵The volumes are Cheney and de Armas (2002) and Hardie and Moore (2010). Quotation from Lipking (1981) xi, although in Lipking (2010) 289 there is some qualification of Virgil's influence: 'Virgil's wheel set the pattern for only a tiny number of heroes.'

⁶Cheney (2002) 7-8. On John of Garland see Putnam and Ziolkowski (2008) 744; and for details on the wheel and illustrations see 745-8.

and commentaries of late antiquity.⁷ In these early commentators' biographies we find the notion that the three styles (low, middle, and high) represented in the three works of Virgil correspond to three stages of human society (shepherds, farmers, and warriors). We also find the poet's life presented as an ascending triad to match his works, along with a more general and persistent tendency towards blurring the lines between Virgil's life and his work.⁸ Andrew Laird refers to this early literary criticism as ruled by 'Emphasis on, or a kind of desire for, the poet's presence' which 'might help to ease the tension between Virgil the author and "Virgil" the body of texts.'⁹ Two examples of what I now view as a perhaps rather primitive form of career criticism formed a key starting point when I first wrote this chapter: the epitaph and the pre-proemium to the *Aeneid*, both cited in the *Vita* attributed to Donatus. Neither passage is thought to be Virgilian, but they both owe something to the final verses of the *Georgics*, often referred to as the poet's *sphragis* – his seal or signature.¹⁰ Both passages borrow two crucial characteristics from the end of the *Georgics*: the first-person voice looking back over past work, and the division of the poet's life into three parts which map onto the three works. The two passages have received a lot of attention with the growth of career criticism, and much valuable and illuminating work has been done on Ovid's reception of the Virgilian career pattern.¹¹

In the light of the emphasis placed by career critics on the public role of poets, and on the relationship between poetry and power, the Virgilian career is now almost always read, as Philip Hardie puts it 'as a progression to an increasing engagement with the extra-literary world'.¹² In Joseph Farrell's reading the model of the *cursus honorum*, the standard Roman aristocratic career pattern, underpins Virgil's career, and makes it necessarily a pattern of progressive approximation to Augustan political ideals. The proem to the third *Georgic* is key to such readings of the Virgilian career, as it dramatizes the author's ambitions towards epic in the form of a military triumph. Understood as progression, or ascent, the Virgilian career pattern is difficult to reconcile with the idea of a critical, ambivalent, or somehow melancholy Virgil, which I advocated in my original chapter. This brings me to my second concern: the end of the *Aeneid*, the end of Virgil's book, and

⁷ The earliest extant *Vita* is the one attributed to the fourth-century grammarian Aelius Donatus. It is thought to rely very heavily on the lost Life of Virgil by Suetonius. On the 'Lives' see Suerbaum (1981) II 57-1262, Ziolkowski (1993) 27-56; Horsfall (2000) 3-4; Putnam and Ziolkowski (2008) 179-403. On how the ancient biographers mine Virgil's poetry to construe his career see Farrell (2002) 25-6; see also Hardie and Powell (2017).

⁸ See Farrell (2002) 25-6; Laird (2009) 2-3.

⁹ Laird (2009) 2. See Peirano (2013) 253-4.

¹⁰ See Farrell (2004) 47-8 and appendix for the discussion surrounding the pre-proemium and its status. See Peirano (2013) 269-80 on the *ille ego* lines as a paradox: both 'authenticating' and 'fake', and more generally on authorial 'signatures'. See Laird (2009) 7 on the influence of *Georgics* 4.559-66 on both passages.

¹¹ See Farrell (2004); Barchiesi and Hardie (2010). See Martelli (2013) for the idea that the *ille ego* lines are an Ovidian gesture.

¹² Hardie (2010) 5. For the role of patronage and self-fashioning in Roman poetic career patterns see Farrell (2002).

the point of thinking about closure. My interest in this was shared by a number of Classicists at the time, and closure did become something of a phenomenon of the nineties.¹³ When it came to the *Aeneid*, the ending and its interpretation were of course at the heart of the debate between the pessimists, who questioned Virgil's political commitment, and those readers who viewed the ending as an expression of the triumph of the new order. There has since then been something of a tendency to move away from the pessimism which had perhaps dominated the liberal critical consensus in Anglo-American scholarship, and towards a stronger emphasis on more historicised interpretations which tend to be less doubtful about Virgil's commitment to the Augustan project.

When I first wrote this chapter, I saw in the wheel of Virgil, the epitaph, and the *ille ego* opening the potential for reading a 'book of Virgil', which was informed by the figure of its author, and by that author's personal voice. I did not see that author as ambitious to progress towards greater and greater engagement with power. I was interested in how, by paying close attention to Virgil's endings, and in particular to the recurring image of shade, we may hear more clearly the notes of regret and pessimism with which the *Aeneid* resounds. As I return to make the necessary revisions to my original essay, I find that, notwithstanding the political overtones of recent career criticism, I have not changed my mind. Virgil's book still resonates with the echoes of the long shades cast at the end of the first Eclogue, and that resonance is enhanced by the way in which, as Don Fowler put it 1997, the shadows of the 'final farewell' at *Aeneid* 12.952 'figure the death of its author as well as of Turnus, and finally put to rest the flight from shade begun in the *Eclogues*.'¹⁴ In the meantime, Michael Putnam has written eloquently in the context of the literary career, about how Virgil educates readers in the 'cyclic meditation of his three masterpieces *en groupe*' and has drawn proper attention to the ways in which Virgil's shade takes the reader from the green fields of pastoral to the killing fields of epic.¹⁵ If we take Virgil's career as modelled on the *cursus honorum* then we accept the teleology of that model, in which the ultimate achievement is the *Aeneid* as the epic of Rome and Virgil's status as 'national poet'. This would be a linear reading of the book of Virgil in which there is no call to look back to the beginnings or down into the darkness. Turnus might descend into the shadows, but the poet and his work stay in the sunlight next to Augustus. In my reading Virgil is less concerned with achieving greater engagement with the Augustan project and more concerned with the cohesion of the world he is creating. In this model, the three works do not form a line but a circle; the motif of shade draws our attention to this and pulls us back to the beginning even as we think we have reached the end.

¹³ See Roberts, Dunn and Fowler (1997), with the important essay by Don Fowler.

¹⁴ Fowler (1997) 14 and n. 47.

¹⁵ Putnam (2010) 35.

In what follows, I have substantially left my original essay intact, except to add bibliographical references and at times reorganise or amplify some of my thinking for the sake of greater clarity.

In the famous epitaph cited in the *Vita* of Donatus, the speaker ‘Virgil’ sums up his life and his works in three parts, mapping the works onto a topographical biography:

Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc

Parthenope; cecini pascua rura duces.

Mantua bore me, the Calabrians took me away, and now Parthenope holds me. I sang of pastures, agriculture, and of leaders. (*Vita Suetonii vulgo Donatiana* 36)

Outside this triad, there is nothing. My concern in this chapter is not the life of the poet, but the idea that we may be invited by this epitaph to read the three canonical works as one poetic space, in terms of an aesthetic and thematic coherence which unites them. I want to show how the sense of closure which unites the works is achieved, and what role is played by the figure of the author in unifying the works, stylistically or formally, and thematically. In this I follow Lipking’s lead, which is why it is important to highlight the point that the endeavour is literary rather than biographical. Because Virgil’s poetic boundaries are stretched to include his entire life’s work from the *Eclogues* onwards, and because the *Aeneid* comes to an end when its author dies, the sense of a totalising teleology within the *oeuvre* really is stronger here than in any other ancient poet.¹⁶ Moreover, the explicitly self-referential passages in which Virgil presents himself as author involved in the shaping of his text may point us towards an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the poet and his poems, which may indeed be closer than we think to the allegorical and literary biographies of antiquity.¹⁷

But the narrative or linear type of closure we find mirrored in the *Vitae*, and in which the three texts are united in the striving for the generic and political climax of the *Aeneid*, is not the only way in which Virgil achieves his Book, or his poetic enclosure. The linear and teleological impulse is often fought against throughout the three texts, and especially in the *Georgics* and in the *Aeneid*. Both of these texts ostensibly celebrate the achievements of Octavian/Augustus, both therefore ostensibly

¹⁶ See Hardie (1993) 102 on post-Virgilian imitations of this.

¹⁷ See Hardie (1993) 99 and 101-2 on the symbiosis of poets and their heroes (and poems). See Laird (2009).

share a sense of ideological closure. And yet, neither text need be read as ultimately committing itself to the empire. The *Aeneid* in particular struggles violently against the linear and seemingly inevitable progress of epic teleology, and this struggle may be read also as the poet's own struggle against the inevitable closure of his Book.¹⁸ In delaying and disrupting the closure of the epic, Virgil repeatedly takes his reader back to an alternative poetic space, the imaginary lands of the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, which he appears only reluctantly to have left behind. As the political ambivalence of the *Aeneid* becomes part of the dynamic of the Book of Virgil, the poet's resistance to epic and empire also structures his resistance to his own paradigmatic career-progress. This anti-teleological struggle may be read as a more circular paradigm of closure to counter the linear structure of the *Vitae*: the Book of Virgil need not be merely about reading forwards towards the satisfaction of the desire for narrative closure, it may offer the reader the pleasures of re-reading, or repetition, which are functions of the internal intertextualities (we could term them intratextualities) that interweave the three texts.¹⁹ Michael Putnam has described this reading around as led by 'Virgil's extraordinary, demanding gestures of circularity' which, he says, keep the reader, while moving forwards through the three works, 'in a continuous present of contemplation.'²⁰ In this circular enclosure the world of the *Eclogues* with its small-scale songs of love and exile becomes part of what Adam Parry referred to as the 'private voice' of the *Aeneid*.²¹

In the midst of empire and ideology, contemplating echoes of the *Eclogues* or *Georgics* may take us back to an Italian landscape which is not yet part of the public world of epic. So, for instance, the pastoral innocence of Italy evoked in *Aeneid* 7 and 8, linked as they are with the youth and innocence of the Arcadian boy Pallas and the pastoral huntress Camilla, not only create a universe of grief and sorrow for the victims of empire, but take the reader of the Book of Virgil back to an alternative poetic world. Most famously perhaps the pathos around the character of the aptly named Umbro, whose demise is mourned not by human followers, but by the landscape (*Aen.* 7.759-60), in an apostrophe which takes us straight back to the trees and the rocks weeping for the dying Gallus in *Ecl.* 10.11-15.²² In other words, the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* are not left behind in the author's poetic progress, but retain a strong presence in the *Aeneid*, and through this intratextuality they invite the reader repeatedly to look back at those parts of the Book she may consider finished and to

¹⁸ See Quint (1993) 50-96.

¹⁹ See Putnam (2010) 20 on the 'interconnecting strands' in the Virgilian corpus. See Sharrock and Morales (2000) 1-39.

²⁰ Putnam (2010) 36.

²¹ Parry (1963).

²² See Parry (1963) 67-69 on Umbro. A further example is Silvia's tame stag wandering in the woods (*errabat silvis*, *Aen.* 7.491), with soft garlands woven into his antlers (*mollibus intexens ornabat cornua sertis*, *Aen.* 7.488) reminiscent of the soft leaves woven into the pliant spears in *Ecl.* 5.31 (*foliis lentas intexere mollibus hastas*).

integrate them into what she can then perceive as a coherent whole.²³ In order, then, to escape from the linear path which the *Vitae* ask us to take in reading the Book of Virgil, it is important to look closely at the ways in which the texts may offer the reader the sensation of closure, without necessarily coercing her into the end-directedness of the linear narrative of progress.

Another aspect of Virgil's ownership, or authority, involves the intertextuality of his works, which has often served to underline the separateness of the three texts by dividing them as imitations of Theocritus, Hesiod, and Homer.²⁴ The tripartition of the models serves to reinforce the sense of hierarchy which helps to form the teleological narrative of the 'poetic career', but which also segregates and categorises the texts into three separate dialogues with three separate predecessors. However, the recognition of Callimachus' presence throughout the three texts (and not merely in the explicitly Callimachean *Eclogues*) has helped to create a better picture of the intricacies of Virgil's intertextualities.²⁵ We can also see the same models echoing throughout, for instance Catullus 64 and Apollonius in both Eclogue 4 and *Aeneid* 8. The Book of Virgil also creates its own intratextualities, for instance in the pattern of allusions which govern *Georgics* 4 and *Aeneid* 2 and 9.²⁶ Richard Thomas has shown how the programmatic Eclogue 6 is linked with the 'proem in the middle' of *Aeneid* 7,²⁷ in a continuous development of the Callimachean intertext, and he has referred to these intratextualities as a 'network' which shapes within the texts a sense of the poetic career.²⁸ Both of these intensely allusive passages are also self-referential and suggest a preoccupation with authorship and originality.²⁹

In her influential study of poetic closure Barbara Herrnstein Smith shows clearly that, as she puts it, 'the perception of closure is a function of the perception of structure'.³⁰ This, evidently, is what happens when we look back over the Virgilian *oeuvre*, having reached the end of the *Aeneid*, and are able to perceive, in retrospect, the three texts as forming the canonical triad. But it might also happen when we merely read 'around' in the three texts, perusing the Book of Virgil without adhering to the linearity prescribed by the *Vita*. So, while we may experience a sense of closure when the textual end or *telos* coincides with a sense of structural stability or coherence, it is also

²³ On the presence of the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* in the *Aeneid* see Briggs (1980).

²⁴ See Servius' preface to the *Georgics*, and Farrell in this volume.

²⁵ On intertextuality in the *Georgics* see Farrell (1991) and his contribution to this volume.

²⁶ See Austin (1964) 285-9; and Hardie (1994) 142-4.

²⁷ Thomas (1983b) and (1986a). See Conte (1992) for 'proems in the middle'.

²⁸ Thomas (1986a) 71.

²⁹ But see Putnam (2010) 19-20 for how the proem to *Eclogue* 6 should not be read as evidence of early career planning by Virgil.

³⁰ Smith (1968) 2. Fowler (1989) offers a useful survey of Classicists' use of Smith's work.

possible to experience closure outside a chronological or linear sequence. Smith draws a useful comparison with visual art, when she says that closure ‘is not always a matter of endings’. She continues by referring to the use of the term ‘closure’ by psychologists, to describe forms that are perceived as clear or coherent: ‘In such forms no particular point is experienced as the last one; and although one can speak of closure in works of spatial art it is obviously inappropriate to speak of it there as a quality of finality or conclusiveness.’³¹

In other words, it is important to discover where and how closure is perceived, when it is not at the end of a text, or when it does not offer the ideological and narrative stopping-point. We are seeking then a sense of completeness or coherence that may hold the three texts of Virgil together, even as we recognise that the teleological narrative we might have relied on to do this is racked with tensions and ruptures, and its linearity crinkled with repetition and digression. Smith’s study shows how we may perceive the completeness and integrity of a poem much as we might perceive that of a piece of music or a picture, through the implicit frame the artistic expression draws around itself:

A passage of music frames itself, so to speak, by being more highly organised than anything else in the environment of sound or silence . . . Similarly, a painting is framed not so much by the piece of wood around its borders as by the borders implied by its own internal structure.³²

The Book of Virgil presents itself so ‘framed’ through its aesthetic coherence. By being more ‘Virgilian’ than anything else around it, the three texts form a sense of coherence by being more like each other than they are like anything else. One way in which this likeness, and the sense of continuity, become manifest, is in Virgil’s consistent use of the hexameter. Other Roman poets also organise their work to a model of progress, as has now been discussed in the two edited volumes on poetic careers mentioned above.³³ But only Virgil chooses to stay with the hexameter throughout, as if to make it quite clear that all three texts are part of his *epos*, literally his utterance.³⁴ The *Appendix Vergiliana* may offer another perspective on the Book of Virgil.³⁵ The unity of the three canonical works, and the way in which it is thematised in the epitaph, in the *sphragis* from the *Georgics*, and in the *ille ego* opening which we are about to move on to can be contrasted usefully

³¹ Smith (1968) 2.

³² Smith (1968) 23-4.

³³ See Zetzel (1983b) and compare Sharrock (1994) 1-2. See Porter (1987) 3-13 on Horace. See also *Arethusa* 13 (1980) no. 1, an entire volume devoted to the ancient poetry book. See Martelli (2013).

³⁴ See Zetzel (1983b) 101: ‘all three works taken together create a poetic universe united by the mastery of one poetic voice’. See Laird (2009) on the poet’s voice.

³⁵ On the *Appendix* see McGill in this volume.

against the non-canonical works of the *Appendix*, described by Peirano as ‘constructing the young Virgil’.³⁶ This ‘new Virgil’, based on the miscellany of works collected in the *Appendix*, but especially the *Culex* and the *Catalepton*, who emerged with the publication of Skutsch’s *Aus Vergils Frühzeit* (1901) was welcomed by some who were not keen on the rigidity of the canonical triad, which left no room for experiment and failure:

From it all there has been born a new Vergil ... a Vergil who, like many another tiro in poetry, tried his prentice hand at parody and skit, wrote rakish verses of which he may afterwards have been ashamed – a new Vergil and a more human Vergil.³⁷

Ironically, however, much of the argument in favour of the authenticity of at least some of the poems in the *Catalepton* for instance rests on the rather circular case of the similarities observed between the ‘autobiographical’ poems and material found in the *Vitae*.³⁸ Equally ironically, the *Culex* is structured to mirror the Virgilian career, and thus also must depend on the kind of hindsight shown by the early commentators.³⁹

This brings us to our second passage from the Donatus *Vita*, and its reflection on how Virgilian self-reference, literary autobiography, and the closure of the Book of Virgil might be linked. This is the so-called *ille ego* opening of the *Aeneid*, which according to Servius was excised by Varius (one of the two men entrusted with Virgil’s literary estate after his death) in favour of the now canonical *arma virumque*:⁴⁰

Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus avena
carmen et egressus silvis vicina coegi
ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono,
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis
arma virumque cano

³⁶ Peirano (2012) 74

³⁷ Stuart (1922) 30.

³⁸ Peirano (2012) 81-82.

³⁹ See Most (1981).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Austin (1968). But see Henry (1873-92) who condemns *arma virumque* as ‘turgid and abrupt’ (5-7), and defends *ille ego*, interestingly, because it is more like the openings of Eclogues 4 and 6 (7-10). For recent bibliography see above n. 10 xx.

That man am I who, having once played his song upon a slender reed, emerging from the woods compelled neighbouring fields to submit even to the greediest farmer, a work welcome to husbandmen, but now Mars's bristling Arms and the Man I sing.

In a short summary of the poetic career we see the clear tripartite division, familiar from the epitaph (quoted above), and we see an attempt, however clumsy, to link the three works together in a narrative of poetic creativity. One important effect of this opening is that it links the *Aeneid*, at its beginning, the poet's literary biography, so that the epic grows out of the two previous works, and not, like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, out of silence interrupted by divine inspiration.⁴¹ The fake proem emphasizes that in Virgil's heroic epic, as in the didactic that precedes it, it is the poet who speaks, in his own right, and not as an instrument of god.⁴²

The pre-proemium should be read as form of exegesis, commenting on the most striking and original feature of the opening of the *Aeneid*: the use of the first-person verb *cano* ('I sing'). Viewed as an interpretation of *cano*, the *ille ego* lines give us a reading of the *Aeneid* as a part of a continuous Virgilian utterance in keeping with the emphasis on the author's voice and presence which we have seen characterizes the early commentators' and biographers' stance. The *ille ego* opening is only grammatically possible because of the presence of *cano* in line 1 of the *Aeneid*. In that sense it is an act of interpretation, which draws attention to all the other first-person assertions of the poet's presence which play a huge part in the shaping of the Book of Virgil. In making the literary autobiography the beginning of the *Aeneid* the author of the *ille ego* lines merely formalizes the narrative of creation and authority set up by the strategic positioning of the first-person verb *cano*.

If we discard the fake proem we can see more clearly how the presence of *cano* at *Aen.* 1.1 belongs to an intratextual sequence of occurrences of first-person forms of that verb, all of them assertions of authority and personal responsibility at strategic or programmatic points. This sequence is another instance of Virgilian 'unities', to use Putnam's word, which link the poet inextricably to his work and which help to unite the works as one.⁴³ In Eclogues 4, 6, and 10 the poet reflects on his poetic ambitions, and on the limitations of his genre. Eclogue 4 opens with *canamus*, and Eclogue 6

⁴¹ See Nuttall (1992) ch.1 and 207-8. See Putnam (2010) 18: 'the arc from *ego* to *cano* implies a unity of imagination behind the whole of Virgil's corpus'.

⁴² Austin (1968) 109 objects to *ille ego* because the personal voice of didactic is incompatible with heroic epic. See Laird (2009) on the voice of the author.

⁴³ See the discussion of Smith (1968) by Hamon (1975) 496 with a list of such *lieux stratégiques*, usually boundaries or transitional passages, all of which are as much connected with the idea of closure as the endings of complete texts.

has *canerem* in the third line, to start off its reworking of Callimachus' two *Aetia* prologues (*Ecl.* 6.3-5, and *Ecl.* 6.64-73).⁴⁴ In the last Eclogue the poet takes his leave of pastoral by referring one last time to his own authorship at *Ecl.* 10.70, *haec sat erit, divae, vestrum cecinisse poetam* ('Goddesses, it will be enough for your poet to have sung these'). The first three books of the *Georgics* open with such assertions: *canere incipiam* ('I will begin to sing'), *G.* 1.5; *canam* ('I shall sing'), *G.* 2.2; *canemus* ('we shall sing'), *G.* 3.1.⁴⁵ Most prominently, the *sphragis* which concludes the *Georgics* is framed by two first-person forms of the verb *cano*, at its beginning and end: *canebam* ('I have been singing') referring to the *Georgics* at 4.559, and *cecini* ('I sang') referring to the *Eclogues* in the final line. It is clear that this is the passage that has most directly influenced both the fake proem and the epitaph. It signs off the *Georgics* with a flourish – inserting the poet's name in 1.564, and citing the first line of the *Eclogues* in the final line.⁴⁶ The difference between this passage and the two fakes we have been discussing is that in these final lines of the *Georgics* there is no hint of the epic to come (this had been announced at the beginning of *Georgics* 3). The third part of the canonical triad is hinted at only by the way in which Caesar's achievements and greatness are framed by the poet's assertion and signature.

Before I move on to Virgil's other endings and to the intratextual arc they form, I want to draw attention to one of the rare authorial interventions in the *Aeneid*, which quite explicitly links a sense of closure and authoritative stability with the self-referential mode. In the address to Nisus and Euryalus in *Aeneid* 9.446-9 the narrator speaks of the power of his poetry, and compares its longevity with that of the Capitoline rock. Virgil's pride in his creation and his confidence in its power have two close relations, one in Horace, *Odes* 3.30, the other in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.871-9. Both are explicitly self-referential, both tie the permanence and stability of poetry to the physical and political power of Rome, and both are closural passages, variations on the Alexandrian *sphragis*, and influenced by the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*. But Virgil's only version of the closural-signature motif in the *Aeneid* is linked to his invention of two minor characters, whose tragedy is their failure as heroes of epic. Perhaps it is not altogether surprising, then, that the authorial intervention, for all its apparent confidence in the stability of the Capitoline rock and the power of the Roman empire, reworks, in the qualified assertion of the power of song, *Aen.* 9.446 *si quid mea*

⁴⁴ See Clausen (1994) 174-7, 179-80, 199-201.

⁴⁵ The beginning of book 4 does not feature *cano* itself but close equivalents (*exsequar* in 1.2 and *dicam* in 1.5)

⁴⁶ See Fowler (1989) 82-4, on 'supertextual closure', especially on the link between *Georgics* and *Eclogues* achieved with the *sphragis*. Peirano (2013) 280 illuminates what is going on very well in writing on Virgil's signature and self-citation as 'putting the author back into the text'. She points out that at the end of the *Georgics* Virgil both cites himself (by referring back to *Eclogues* 1.1) and names himself (*G.* 4.563 *Vergilium*): 'if the name refers the reader to the physical body of the author, self-citation directs attention to his poetic corpus.'

carmina possunt ('if my songs have any power'), one of the most pessimistic passages from the *Eclogues* (*Ecl.* 9.11-13) in which the power of poetry in the midst of empire is less than certain.⁴⁷

As strategic points in the Book of Virgil, we must look also at the endings of the three texts, and at the story of closure they tell. All of Virgil's endings tend to look back to the final line of the first Eclogue, which is a version of the beginning of Virgilian poetry with Tityrus' leisure in the shade (*Ecl.* 1.4 *lentus in umbra*). Within its 83 lines Eclogue 1 is a microcosm of the entire Eclogue collection. This first poem contains the transformation of shade from a peaceful enclosure or shelter into a menacing darkness which envelops the landscape completely in *Ecl.* 1.83 *maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae* ('larger now the shadows are falling from the high mountains'). It contains also the destruction of pastoral innocence and the compensation offered by Rome and civilisation. In the figure of Meliboeus, the poem contains exile and the end of poetry in *Ecl.* 1.77 *carmina nulla canam* ('I will sing no more songs'). As a microcosm of the Eclogue book, Eclogue 1 is also a microcosm of the Book of Virgil, which prefigures the development from light to darkness, the loss of pastoral innocence, and the final goal of Roman civilisation. Eclogue 1 is the beginning of the end, and the shadows that fall from its closure reach out over the entire corpus of Virgil's poetry. When we read the last words of the *Aeneid*, the death of Turnus and his descent *sub umbras* ('under the shadows'), the Book of Virgil has ended in darkness, just like Eclogue 1. In the final lines of Eclogue 10 evening falls again, this time to end the collection. Tityrus' shade is now rejected as harmful to both singers and crops, and so the poet demands that singers (and readers) should rise up from its shelter (*Ecl.* 10.75 *surgamus*). The rise from the humility and the leisure of the shade towards the didactic toils of the *Georgics* is well prepared for by the farewell in the preceding lines.⁴⁸ The exhortation *surgamus* is striking in a closing passage, where we might expect a downwards movement, to illustrate the sense of an ending, as for instance the first Eclogue gives us *cadunt* as a closural image.⁴⁹ Rising up implies quite strongly a beginning, leaving behind the past, and in a sense closing it, but at the same time an awareness of the new opening.⁵⁰ The end of Eclogue 10 shows how easily an end may become a beginning, within a larger intratextual structure.⁵¹ The didactic poem is not entirely separate because it shares with its humble predecessor the author's voice. That voice asserts its presence when the *sphragis* of *Georgics* 4 reverts to a notion of the shade as *locus amoenus* which the end of Eclogue 10 had abandoned. As we shall now see, within the larger structure of the Book of Virgil, the dynamic of closure and continuation tells

⁴⁷ On Nisus and Euryalus see Hardie (1994) 153-5. See also Feeney (1991) 184-7 on the poet's command over his text.

⁴⁸ See Kennedy (1983).

⁴⁹ See Smith (1968) 172-82 for 'closural allusions'.

⁵⁰ Compare the end of *Aeneid* 2, with *surgebat*. See the discussion in Nagle (1983).

⁵¹ See Hardie (1993) 13 for epic endings which are also beginnings, and Fowler (1989) 82 for 'supertextual groupings'.

of a career and of the formation of a coherent and mature authorial voice, which may not be entirely committed to the model of progress offered by the hierarchy of genre.

The final line of the *Aeneid* returns to a different and darker *umbra*: 12.952 *vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras* ('and life fled with a groan, indignant, to the shadows'). On a first reading, *umbras* here must refer to the ghosts of the dead in the Underworld, not to shadows or darkness. But the ramifications of this word are prepared for not only through the development in the *Eclogues*, but again in the *Aeneid* itself, and particularly in *Aeneid* 6. Here, *umbra* is sometimes used to refer to the shades of the departed, the *simulacra* which populate the Underworld (e.g., 6.401). But *Aeneid* 6 covers a range of meanings of *umbra*, using it to denote the darkness of the Underworld, for instance in 6.268 *ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram* ('obscured they walked, through the darkness in the desolate night'), or in 6.340 *vix multa maestum cognovit in umbra* ('he hardly recognised him, sorrowful, in the thick shadow'). In some instances the distinction between ghosts and darkness is almost impossible to draw, as indeed the ghosts themselves are almost indiscernible to Aeneas' eye in the murky darkness of the Underworld. Most poignantly, Aeneas sees, or thinks he sees, Dido in the dark woods of the Grieving Fields, *Aen.* 6.452-3 *per umbras | obscuram* ('obscured amongst the shades' or 'obscured by darkness'). The figure of Dido is obscured by darkness, but she is also one of a crowd of other ghosts who fill the woods, so that Aeneas' difficulty in seeing her depends precisely on the difficulty of distinguishing between shadows and shades. Dido is like Aeneas when he first entered the Underworld with the Sibyl (*Aen.* 6.268), but the sense of confusion and of the erosion of difference between darkness and human shades in the later passage is heightened by the absence of an 'objective' narrator's voice which might help to determine the differences and to separate the *umbra* of darkness from the *umbra* of shades perceived by Aeneas.⁵² But it is at the end of the *Georgics*, with Orpheus' descent, that pastoral shade and its darker versions meet and almost become one. First, *umbrae* are the ghosts, or images of the dead (*G.* 4.472). Then, when Orpheus loses Eurydice for the second time, *G.* 4.501 *prensantem nequiquam umbras* ('vainly clasping the shadows'), Eurydice's image becomes one with the darkness which swallows it. After his loss, Orpheus in his endless grief is compared in a simile borrowed from Penelope's account of her sleepless nights in the *Odyssey* to the nightingale, singing in the shade of a poplar tree at night. This night-time shade is both the *locus amoenus* of bucolic song and the cold shades of night, which fall at the end of *Eclogues* 1 and 10. So, the *Georgics* ends by reworking the development of *umbra* from song to silence, from light to darkness,

⁵² Compare Austin (1964) 277 on a similar use of *umbra* at *Aen.* 2.768-72.

and by introducing the new deathly dimension of the shade which will end the *Aeneid* with Turnus' descent.

Through the development of shade and darkness, the Book of Virgil tells a story which appears to run entirely opposite to the teleology of both the empire and the career-progress of its poet. It is significant that Aeneas, at the last moment, hands over the responsibility for his act of closure to Pallas, the dead Arcadian boy. The killing of Turnus is an act driven by memory, and this memory is not merely that of the character Aeneas, but also that of the reader, and of the poet, who twice repeats the name of the Arcadian (*Aen.* 12.848-9 *Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas | immolat*), just as, near the end of Eclogue 10, he repeats the name of Gallus, who tried and failed to become an Arcadian (*Ecl.* 10.72-3 *vos haec facietis maxima Gallo, | Gallo*). Virgil's last words, *sub umbras*, recall at the same time the death of an ideal 'Arcadian' Italy and the darkness which puts an end to all singing. *Sub umbras* is both a version of Tityrus' shelter under the beech tree and of the shadows of the night which end the first Eclogue. Through the intratextual echoing which shapes the Book of Virgil the final lines of the *Aeneid* return to the impossible pastoral of the first and the last Eclogues, at the very moment when we might expect the triumph of epic and empire.

Further Reading

On literary careers, Lipking (1981) is still core reading. The introductions to the edited volumes, Hardie and Moore (2010) and Cheney and de Armas (2002) are very good for orientation. Farrell (2002) is important reading on classical careers. Putnam (2010) makes the case for Virgilian unity beautifully. Peirano (2013) is a key item to read on the *ille ego* opening. Fowler (1989) is still important and resonant on closure in classical literature. Smith (1968) remains key on the details of how poetic closure works.