

**Monica GALE**

**Caesar and the Poet: Closure and Anti-Closure in the *Georgics***

This paper will explore the interplay between the formal closure of Virgil's *Georgics* and the poem's openness to a plurality of different interpretations; I will argue that the laconic juxtaposition of poet and princeps in the final lines simultaneously contributes to the reader's sense of an ending and reopens unresolved questions which have surfaced periodically through the four books of the poem.

In formal terms, the *sphragis* closes off the work with an elegant and satisfying finality. The concluding signature both acts as a mark of closure in itself and also serves in various ways to complete the 'architectural' structure of the poem as a whole. It is, then, something of a paradox that this formal closure coexists with a high degree of openness at the level of meaning and interpretation. The implications of the bare juxtaposition of poet and statesman are tantalizing and elusive. How seriously should we take Virgil's self-deprecation? Is his overt praise of Octavian undercut by the (mock?) modesty of the phrase *ignobilis oti*?

Some light can be shed on these questions by viewing the *sphragis* as the final development of a theme which runs through the whole poem. The roles of poet and statesman are highly ambiguous in their relation to the theme of order and control which is represented on the most obvious level by the farmer's imposition of order on the unruly forces of nature: each is associated, at different points in the poem, with both harmonious collaboration and disorderly passion. The pairing of the two figures in the closing lines of the poem arguably restates these tensions without resolving them.

The interpretation of the *sphragis* is also bound up with the interpretation of the Aristaeus epyllion: in particular, the contrast between the dynamic Aristaeus and the self-absorbed poet-figure Orpheus clearly anticipates (and will colour the reader's reaction to) the contrast between Octavian's conquests and Virgil's 'inglorious ease'. It may be significant, from this point of view, that Virgil represents himself in the closing lines as looking back in time, just as Orpheus looks back in space. Orpheus' fateful gesture can be linked in turn with the theme of remembrance in the *Aeneid*, where the hero's need to forget his past and move on is in constant and unresolved tension with the epic poet's traditional function of memorializing the great men and deeds of former times.