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# EARLY RESPONSES TO VIRGIL'S FOURTH *ECLOGUE*[*]

The fourth *Eclogue* presents itself explicitly as a political poem, a loftier intervention in the humble world of pastoral poetry (4.1–3). This grander type of pastoral, moreover, is singled out as possessing a specifically Roman political significance: these 'woods' are to be 'worthy of a consul' (*silvae sint consule dignae*, 3), and the coming Golden Age is set within a precisely identifiable political context, the consulship of C. Asinius Pollio in 40 BC (*te consule*, 4.11).[1] Beyond that, however, the details of the relationship between the miraculous child, whose growth to maturity will be accompanied by the fabulous portents of the new era, and the contemporary political setting at Rome are left tantalizingly, perhaps prudently, vague.[2] It was no doubt with a view to promoting his own political interests that Pollio's son, 'the rash and ambitious Asinius Gallus', claimed to have been the original *puer* of Virgil's poem.[3] If so, he was very far from being the last public figure to appropriate the resounding cadences of the fourth *Eclogue* to

[*] Previous drafts of this material were presented in Edinburgh, London, and Oxford; I am grateful to the audiences on these occasions, especially Dominic Berry, Gavin Kelly, Fiachra Mac Góráin, Gesine Manuwald, and Tobias Reinhardt, and to an anonymous reader for *Greece & Rome*, for suggesting many improvements. All translations are my own.

[1] That is not to say that the dating of the poem itself has proved uncontroversial: see e.g. L. Berkowitz, 'Pollio and the Date of the Fourth "Eclogue"', *CSCA* 5 (1972), 21–38; I. M. Le M. Du Quesnay, 'Vergil's Fourth Eclogue', *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 1 (1977), 30–1.

[2] See J. Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy. Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), 196: 'A good prophet remains vague, lest what is foretold never comes to pass. Yet in a prophet's vagueness also lies the opportunity, often readily welcomed, for the listener to match up what is said to some contemporary event… Still, the poet (with great foresight) left posterity free to make other identifications…'. See also J. F. Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets* (Cambridge, 2009), 255 with n. 4 ('The indeterminacy may have been by design'); W. Warde Fowler, 'The Child of the Poem', in J. B. Mayor, W. Warde Fowler, and R. S. Conway, *Virgil's Messianic Eclogue. Its Meaning, Occasion, & Sources* (London, 1907), 84 ('I believe that he intentionally left it wrapped in obscurity and surrounded by appropriate mystery').

[3] W. Clausen (ed.), *Virgil. Eclogues* (Oxford, 1994), 126. On the political career of Asinius Gallus (consul in 8 BC), see e.g. D. C. A. Shotter, 'Tiberius and Asinius Gallus', *Historia* 20 (1971), 443–57; A. B. Bosworth, 'Tacitus and Asinius Gallus', *AJAH* 11 (1977), 173–92; H. I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting. Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), 143–8; O. Devillers, 'Les passages relatifs à Asinius Gallus dans les *Annales* de Tacite', *REL* 87 (2009), 154–65. On his identification with the child of the eclogue, see R. Waltz, 'La

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endorse his own position: it was not long before (in Harry Levin's words) 'The Pollio eclogue had virtually created a minor genre, a means for the court poet to flatter his sovereign, as well as a device for balancing the moderns against the ancients.'[4] But even before the opportunistic assertions of Pollio's son, the poem's prophecies of a new age had already been re-appropriated to tie down the oracular generalities of the eclogue to a particular individual and a definite set of political circumstances, in a move that was to have significant repercussions for the later fortunes of Virgil's essay in pastoral panegyric.

## 1. Virgil

The earliest identifiable responses to the fourth *Eclogue*, with the possible exception of Horace's sixteenth *Epode*,[5] come from the author himself. The first of these indicates that the story of the poem's reception had begun even before the collection in which it now stands had left Virgil's study.[6] In the résumé of Silenus' narrative of world history in the sixth *Eclogue*, we find a reference to *Saturnia regna* (repeating the phrase from the end of *Ecl.* 4.6, *redeunt Saturnia regna*) as the period following the Flood, when the earth was repopulated from stones cast by Deucalion and his wife, Pyrrha (*Ecl.* 6.41–4):[7]

> *hinc lapides Pyrrhae iactos, Saturnia regna,*
> *Caucasiasque refert volucris, furtumque Promethei.*
> *his adiungit Hylan nautae quo fonte relictum*
> *clamassent, ut litus Hyla, Hyla, omne sonaret...*

IVe églogue et Asinius Gallus', in *Mélanges Paul Thomas. Receuil de mémoires concernant la philologie classique, dédié à Paul Thomas* (Bruges, 1930), 738–46.

[4] H. Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (London, 1970), 18.

[5] On this vexed question, see e.g. S. J. Harrison, *Generic Enrichment in Vergil and Horace* (Oxford, 2007), 131–4; L. C. Watson, *A Commentary on Horace's Epodes* (Oxford, 2003), 486–8, with 486 n. 29 for further bibliography; A. Setaioli, 'Gli "Epodi" di Orazio nella critica dal 1937 al 1972 (con un'appendice fino al 1978)', *ANRW* ii.31.3 (1981), 1753–61; V. Schmidt, 'Redeunt Saturnia Regna: Studien zu Vergils vierter Ecloga', PhD thesis, University of Groningen (1977), 101–13.

[6] Cf. L. B. T. Houghton and E. Buckley, '*Si quid mea carmina possunt...*: Reflections on the Virgilian Tradition', *JRS* 99 (2009), 207 with n. 3, citing S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone. Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse* (Cambridge, 1987), 135, on Ovid.

[7] The relative dates of the two poems are disputed: for discussion see Clausen (n. 3), xxii with n. 34. What is most important for our purposes is that *Eclogue* 6 follows *Eclogue* 4 in a sequential reading of the collection.

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After this he tells of the stones hurled by Pyrrha, the reign of Saturn, and the Caucasian birds, and Prometheus' theft. To these he adds at what spring the sailors called out for Hylas, left behind, how the whole shore echoed 'Hylas, Hylas'...

Commentators from Servius onwards have noted this unexpected departure from the usual historical sequence: traditionally the Age of Saturn preceded the depopulation and restoration of the world in the time of Deucalion and Pyrrha.[8] Yet the relocation of the Golden Age between the deluge and the expedition of the Argonauts (6.43–4) might be seen as offering a retrospective contribution to the interpretation of the fourth *Eclogue*. The lines in *Eclogue* 6 cast *Saturnia regna* as consequent upon a renewal of humankind after near-total destruction; the era immediately preceding the revival of *Saturnia regna* proclaimed by *Eclogue* 4 (a revival that will involve a repetition of the age of heroes, including a new voyage of the Argo, 4.34–5) is thus implicitly characterized as a cataclysm on the scale of the Flood – and this is indeed an image used elsewhere to denote the civil wars ended by Octavian's ascendancy (see Horace, *Odes* 1.2.1–12, where we even have mention of the return of a *saeculum*, 5–6).

Might the repetition of *Saturnia regna* in *Eclogue* 6 thereby serve to hint at the political situation that led to the creation of the fourth *Eclogue*? Perhaps, as Charles Segal remarks, 'These very concise allusions should not be pressed too hard':[9] after all, in the song of Silenus the punishment and crime (in that order) of Prometheus come between *Saturnia regna* and the loss of Hylas, so that the sequence connecting Golden Age and age of heroes is not a direct transition – and in the fourth *Eclogue* the repeat of the heroic age forms part of the process by which the Golden Age is to be established, not a sequel to it, as in the later poem. It has also been suggested that the verbal repetition from *Eclogue* 4 was dictated by metrical considerations, rather than by

[8] See Servius on *Ecl.* 6.41: *quod autem dicit 'regna Saturnia', fabularum ordinem vertit* ('As for the fact that he says "Saturn's reign", he changes the order of the stories'); also e.g. E. Gee, *Aratus and the Astronomical Tradition* (Oxford, 2013), 247 n. 22; A. Cucchiarelli (ed.), *Publio Virgilio Marone. Le Bucoliche* (Rome, 2012), 346; M. Paschalis, '*Semina ignis*: The Interplay of Science and Myth in the Song of Silenus', *AJPh* 122 (2001), 201–22; Clausen (n. 3), 192; P. A. Johnston, *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age. A Study of the Georgics* (Leiden, 1980), 9–10; R. Coleman (ed.), *Vergil. Eclogues* (Cambridge, 1977), 187; N. Rudd, *Lines of Enquiry. Studies in Latin Poetry* (Cambridge, 1976), 138; C. P. Segal, 'Vergil's Sixth *Eclogue* and the Problem of Evil', *TAPhA* 100 (1969), 410–11; O. Skutsch, 'Symmetry and Sense in the *Eclogues*', *HSPh* 73 (1969), 164–5. A smaller-scale reversal might be seen in the following line, where the punishment implied by *Caucasias...volucris* is mentioned before *furtum...Promethei*.

[9] Segal (n. 8), 411.

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the desire to create a thematic link or dialogue between the two pieces.[10] In view of the striking internal echoes elsewhere in the *Eclogues*,[11] however, it is difficult to rule out the possibility of a deeper engagement between these two items signposted by the shared line-ending here.

The hopes inspired by the Pact of Brundisium, with which the optimistic pronouncements of Virgil's poem have generally been associated,[12] were soon crushed by the resumption of hostilities, and by the time that Virgil came to compose the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*, the character of Roman politics had changed forever with the emergence of Octavian, later Augustus, as the holder of supreme power in the state and empire. Although the *princeps*' position was by no means as secure as it might have seemed with hindsight later in his reign, the Sibylline equivocation of the eclogue was no longer feasible, particularly for a writer under the patronage of Augustus' minister Maecenas. In his two subsequent works, we see Virgil repositioning the fourth *Eclogue*, implicitly 'correcting' or recasting it as an anticipation of the blessings of the Augustan supremacy, in a way that reclaims the language and imagery of the earlier poem to reflect (at least apparently) the poet's support for the new regime.

The vision of the Golden Age presented in the first book of the *Georgics* (*G.* 1.125–59), despite exhibiting among its principal characteristics the absence of agriculture (1.125) and the spontaneous generation of natural produce (1.127–8), is noticeably different from the marvels of the returning Golden Age in *Eclogue* 4.[13] The former occurred in the remote past, and was haunted by the threat of sloth

[10] So Coleman (n. 8), 187: 'probably a necessary metrical variant for *Saturnium regnum*'.

[11] See especially *Ecl.* 5.86–7, quoting 2.1 and 3.1; such internal recollection may indeed be present in the lines preceding *Ecl.* 6.41, where Silenus' song recounts how *altius atQUE CADaNT submotis nubIBUS iMBRes* ('and showers fall from the clouds removed on high', 6.38) – cf. *maioresQUE CADuNT altis de montIBUS uMBRae* ('and longer shadows are falling from the high mountains', *Ecl.* 1.83). If this rather slight echo is accepted, *Ecl.* 6.39, with its reference to the time when *silvae* (cf. *Ecl.* 4.3) first begin to rise, might be seen as an implicit acknowledgement of the allusion to the first of Virgil's pastoral poems.

[12] See e.g. Clausen (n. 3), 121–2; Cucchiarelli (n. 8), 238–9.

[13] Johnston (n. 8), 50; K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture. An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 95; R. A. Apostol, 'Rome's Bucolic Landscapes: Place, Prophecy, and Power in *Aeneid* VIII', PhD thesis, University of Michigan (2009), 126; A. T. Zanker, 'Late Horatian Lyric and the Virgilian Golden Age', *AJPh* 131 (2010), 501. For discussion of Virgilian variations on the theme of the Golden Age, see also I. S. Ryberg, 'Vergil's Golden Age', *TAPhA* 89 (1958), 112–31; K. J. Reckford, 'Some Appearances of the Golden Age', *CJ* 54 (1958), 79–87; H. Reynen, 'Ewiger Frühling und goldene Zeit: zum Mythos des goldenen Zeitalters bei Ovid und Vergil', *Gymnasium* 72 (1965), 415–33; H.-J. Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis* (Heidelberg, 1965; repr. Tübingen, 1994), 69–95; M. Wifstrand Schiebe, *Das ideale Dasein bei Tibull und die Goldzeitkonzeption Vergils* (Uppsala, 1981), 19–53; A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The

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(*G.* 1.124) – a surprisingly negative presentation, surely conditioned by the largely (but not wholly) positive connotations with which Virgil invests agricultural labour in his didactic poem. As so often in the *Georgics*, however, the poet later complicates his overall position by treating the same thematic material from a different perspective.[14] The idealized view of rural life offered at the end of the second book culminates in the assertion *aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat* ('this life golden Saturn once led on earth', 2.538), which creates a clear link with the *Saturnia regna* of *Ecl.* 4.6 and the restored *gens aurea* of *Ecl.* 4.9; the inhabitants of the countryside are moreover said to be the last people among whom Justice (the *Virgo* of *Ecl.* 4.6) passed before leaving the earth (*G.* 2.473–4). Unusually, this Saturnian Golden Age in *Georgics* Book 2 – unlike the pre-Jovian Golden Age of the first book – not only makes allowance for the practice of agriculture, a feature specifically absent from the spontaneously fertile world of the fourth *Eclogue* (4.40–1), but is actually predicated upon it.[15] Insofar as the agricultural life is presented in Virgil's treatise as a morally preferable alternative to warfare, and in particular to warfare between brothers (see especially *G.* 1.505–8, 2.495–6), the political implications of exalting this idealized rural existence to the status of a Saturnian Golden Age are clear. Since the poem appears to suggest that its author's fervent hope is for a reflorescence of Italian agriculture under the tutelage of Octavian, who will bring to the world – and more specifically to the land of Italy, *Saturnia tellus* (2.173) – the peaceful conditions needed for unhindered cultivation (1.498–501), the implicit conclusion is that the only hope for achieving a latter-day restoration of the kind of life led by 'golden Saturn' lies in the supremacy of Caesar's heir.[16]

The somewhat oblique intimation conveyed by Virgil's comparison of the farmer's existence to the lifestyle of Saturn in the *Georgics* is

Golden Age and Sin in Augustan Ideology', *P&P* 95 (1982), 20–5; M. Pavan, 'Aurea (aetas, gens; aurea saecula)', in F. Della Corte (ed.), *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* (Rome, 1984–91), i.412–18.

[14] See M. R. Gale, *Virgil on the Nature of Things. The Georgics, Lucretius and the Didactic Tradition* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. 24, 45, 50, 58, 71–2. Zanker (n. 13), 501, analysing Virgil's treatment of the Golden Age in the *Georgics*, draws attention to 'multiple versions within the same text' (see also 502 n. 23).

[15] See Johnston (n. 8), esp. 62–89; also Galinsky (n. 13), 95; Wifstrand Schiebe (n. 13), 40, who nonetheless traces a relationship between *Ecl.* 4 and the praise of Italy at *G.* 2.136–76 (32–6).

[16] Cf. Mähl (n. 13), 88–9.

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spelled out far more explicitly in the *Aeneid*,[17] where in the parade of future Roman notables shown to Aeneas in the underworld the hero's descendant Octavian, now Augustus, is introduced expressly as the subject of prophecy and as the restorer of the Golden Age (*Aeneid* 6.791–7):

> *hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,*
> *Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet*
> *saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva*
> *Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos*
> *proferet imperium; iacet extra sidera tellus,* 795
> *extra anni solisque vias, ubi caelifer Atlas*
> *axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum.*

This, this is the man you so often hear promised to you – Augustus Caesar, sprung from a god, who will found again the Golden Age in Latium through the fields once ruled by Saturn, and will extend the empire over Garamantes and Indians; his earth lies beyond the stars, beyond the paths of the year and the sun, where Atlas, bearer of the heavens, turns on his shoulder the axle studded with shining stars.

Within the narrative of the poem, the many promises associated with Augustus by the speaker, Anchises, no doubt indicate previous prophecies which we may imagine his addressee, Aeneas (*tibi*, 6.791), to have heard – although none of those so far relayed to him in the course of the poem has referred to a specific descendant. For the reader, however, Anchises' allusion to the frequency with which Augustus Caesar has been promised surely recalls earlier anticipations of Augustus within the epic, such as Jupiter's prophecy to Venus in Book 1 (1.286–8), and perhaps also the more general prediction of the rule of Aeneas' descendants over the Trojans at *Iliad* 20.307–8. But above all, the language used of the reign of Augustus here serves to connect his principate with the epochal promises of the fourth *Eclogue*:[18] it is Augustus, in particular, who will restore *Saturnia regna* (*Ecl.* 4.6, echoed in *regnata…Saturno*,

[17] P. Hardie, *The Last Trojan Hero. A Cultural History of Virgil's Aeneid* (London and New York, 2014), 3, 95–6, sees the entire plot of the *Aeneid* as patterned on conceptions articulated in the fourth *Eclogue*.

[18] See Cucchiarelli (n. 8), 237–8 ('Lo stesso Virgilio ha contribuito a confondere i suoi lettori, riutilizzando il linguaggio profetico dell'ecloga 4 per Augusto in *Aen.* 6, 791–807' [237]); A. Cucchiarelli, '*Aeneid* 6', *CR* n.s. 65 (2015), 455; T. Geue, 'Princeps "avant la lettre": The Foundations of Augustus in Pre-Augustan Poetry', in M. Labate and G. Rosati (eds.), *La costruzione del mito augusteo* (Heidelberg, 2013), 59–60, 61–2. The emphatic reference to Augustus as *vir* ('the man') in *Aen.* 6.791 might be seen as an insinuation of the ultimate fulfilment of the prediction at *Ecl.* 4.37, *hinc, ubi iam firmata VIRUM te fecerit aetas…* ('Then, when your age now strengthened has made you a man…').

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*Aen.* 6.793–4), inaugurating new *saecula* (6.793; cf. *saeclorum. . .ordo*, *Ecl.* 4.5) which will possess the same golden (*aurea*, 6.792) character as the 'golden race' (*gens aurea*, *Ecl.* 4.9) of the eclogue. Might the collocation *GENuS AUREA* at *Aeneid* 6.792 even represent a verbal play on the phrase from the earlier poem, literally inscribing *gens aurea* within the description of Augustus' restoration of the Golden Age? If so, we can see Virgil replicating on a textual level the action of Augustus in the terrestrial sphere, reintroducing in his prophecy of the *princeps*' accomplishments the promised age foretold in the fourth *Eclogue*.

Again, while the epithet *divi genus* ('sprung from a god', 6.792) may be intended to recall the title *divi filius*, 'son of a god', used officially by Augustus,[19] it might also be seen as an equivalent to the designation of the child of the fourth *Eclogue* as *deum suboles* ('offspring of gods', 4.49), casting Augustus in retrospect as the miraculous *puer* of the new age. Such an association is reinforced by Anchises' announcement immediately before this passage, *hic Caesar et omnis Iuli / progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem* ('Here is Caesar, and the whole progeny of Iulus that is to come beneath the great axle of heaven', 6.789–90). Not least among the *progenies* of the deified Caesar, we may suppose, is Augustus himself, the next figure to be introduced in the catalogue. Both the language of divine descent and the use of the term *progenies* (cf. *nova progenies*, *Ecl.* 4.7) serve to identify Caesar's heir with the emblematic child of the Golden Age, leaving no doubt that the reader is expected to revise any lingering uncertainty over the identity of the mysterious *puer* in the earlier piece.[20] Clearly, in view of the multitude of theories that continued to circulate on the question long after the composition of the *Aeneid*, Virgil's retrospective attempt to impose Augustus' features on the nameless child of the eclogue was not altogether successful, though it may have contributed to Octavian's continuing presence among the ranks of possible candidates. But by re-appropriating the vocabulary and imagery of the fourth *Eclogue* to glorify the first of the emperors,[21] the poet ensured for this passage

[19] See e.g. R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber sextus* (Oxford, 1977), 243 on *Aen.* 6.792.

[20] And in fact the majority of the other words in *Aen.* 6.790 can also be found in the eclogue: *magnum* (cf. *magnus. . .ordo*, *Ecl.* 4.5), *caeli* (*caelo. . .alto*, *Ecl.* 4.7), *ventura* (*venturo. . .saeclo*, *Ecl.* 4.52).

[21] For a less celebratory reading of the lines, and of the Golden Age theme in the *Aeneid* more generally, see R. F. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge, 2001), 1–7;

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and its source a long and often hackneyed afterlife among later holders of the office who sought to model their public presentation on that of 'il buono Augusto' (Dante, *Inferno* 1.71).

What Augustus' restoration of *aurea. . .saecula* to Latium might entail is indicated by the reappearance of the theme in the eighth book of the *Aeneid*, where Evander describes the primitive state of the region under Saturn, who united the race and gave it laws,[22] and gave the land its name from his having lain hidden there (*quoniam latuisset*, 8.319–23). By implication, then, the age of Augustus as envisaged in *Aeneid* 6 will witness another coalescence of the people of Latium – that is, the Romans – after the divisive civil wars, and the return of law. This suggestion is confirmed in the following lines (*Aen.* 8.324–7), where peace is alliteratively singled out as the defining characteristic of the Saturnian age, and the degeneration of this primeval tranquillity is associated with the emergence of *belli rabies* ('the mad rage of warfare') and *amor. . .habendi* ('love of possession') – traditional features of the myth of decline (as later reflected in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.131, *insidiaeque et vis et amor sceleratus habendi*: 'ambush and violence and accursed love of possession'), but also elements in the conventional analysis of the causes of the recent civil conflict in Roman literature of the time (see e.g. Hor. *Epod.* 7.11–14; Livy, preface 11–12):

> *aurea quae perhibent illo sub rege fuere*
> *saecula: sic placida populos in pace regebat,* 325
> *deterior donec paulatim ac decolor aetas*
> *et belli rabies et amor successit habendi.*

The age which they call golden existed under that king: like this he ruled the peoples in untroubled peace, until gradually a worse and discoloured age succeeded it, along with the mad rage of warfare and love of possession.

The expression *quae perhibent* ('which they call', 8.324) no doubt points to previous accounts of the myth of the ages in literature prior to Virgil – but also, surely, to the use of the exact phrase *aurea. . .saecula* at *Aeneid* 6.792–3; to Hesiod and Aratus we must add Anchises. The renewal of Saturn's reign under the heir of Caesar will reverse the

also A. J. Boyle, 'The Canonic Text: Virgil's *Aeneid*', in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic* (London and New York, 1993), 98.

[22] This assertion is arguably inconsistent with the reference at *Aen.* 7.203 to *Saturni gentem haud vinclo nec legibus aequam* ('the race of Saturn, just not through chain nor through laws'); for contradictions in Virgil's presentation of the Saturnian Golden Age, see below, n. 24.

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sequence of historical decay, replacing the crazed appetite for war and the lust for acquisition with unbroken peace. And, although in the fourth *Eclogue* Virgil talks not of *aurea…saecula* ('the Golden Age') but of *gens aurea* ('the golden race', *Ecl.* 4.9), he nonetheless links this with the dawning of the new *saeculum* (see *Ecl.* 4.5, 52) and the return of the reign of Saturn (*Ecl.* 4.6), so there is perhaps some justification for including the poet's earlier piece as well under the multiple allusion of *Aen.* 8.324–5.[23] The suggestion is reinforced by Diomedes' response to the Latin ambassadors at *Aen.* 11.252–3, which refers to the ancient virtues of their race with the words *fortunatae gentes, Saturnia regna, / antiqui Ausonii* ('fortunate peoples, kingdom of Saturn, ancient folk of Ausonia'), explicitly evoking the line-ending of *Ecl.* 4.6. Those who detect in the *Aeneid* a darker, less celebratory note draw attention to the discrepancy between the peaceful condition of Saturn's rule in Evander's account and the militaristic character of Augustus' imperial Golden Age as prophesied in Book 6.[24] On either reading, there can be little doubt that Virgil's references to the return of the Golden Age carry with them contemporary political connotations, and that, even if the potential complexity of the poet's handling of these themes has not always been perceived or matched by his emulators in subsequent periods, the associations they perpetuated have played a significant part in the later fortunes of Virgil's poetry in the political sphere.

## 2. Tibullus and Horace

Between the appearance of the *Georgics* and that of the *Aeneid*, if we follow the traditional chronology of the elegist's career, falls the first book of Tibullus' elegies. In the third poem of the collection, the lover is pictured lying sick on a distant island, lamenting that he has been brought to this pass by following his patron Messalla on the latter's expedition

[23] Apostol (n. 13), 25–6, sees a close relationship between *Eclogue* 4 and these lines in *Aeneid* 8, and a shared political resonance for Virgil's contemporaries (on the political implications of Saturn's rule as described by Evander, see also *ibid.*, 134–40).

[24] See e.g. Thomas (n. 21), 2–3; C. Perkell, 'The Golden Age and its Contradictions in the Poetry of Vergil', *Vergilius* 48 (2002), 28–34. For discussion see also Apostol (n. 13), 132–3, 134–5; and for further consideration of possible inconsistencies in Virgil's treatment of Saturn and the Golden Age, see C. Ware, *Claudian and the Roman Epic Tradition* (Cambridge, 2012), 178–81 ('To attempt to define the golden age from studying the *Eclogue* and the *Aeneid* is to confront a series of paradoxes' [181]); J. J. O'Hara, *Inconsistency in Roman Epic. Studies in Catullus, Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan* (Cambridge, 2007), 100–2; Perkell (this note); Pavan (n. 13).

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to the east. How much better, he exclaims, would it have been to have lived in the Golden Age before warfare and voyaging were brought into the world (Tibullus 1.3.35–50):

*quam bene Saturno vivebant rege, priusquam*
*tellus in longas est patefacta vias!*
*nondum caeruleas pinus contempserat undas,*
*effusum ventis praebueratque sinum,*
*nec vagus ignotis repetens compendia terris*
*presserat externa navita merce ratem.*
*illo non validus subiit iuga tempore taurus,*
*non domito frenos ore momordit equus,*
*non domus ulla fores habuit, non fixus in agris,*
*qui regeret certis finibus arva, lapis.*
*ipsae mella dabant quercus, ultroque ferebant*
*obvia securis ubera lactis oves.*
*non acies, non ira fuit, non bella, nec ensem*
*immiti saevus duxerat arte faber.*
*nunc Iove sub domino caedes et vulnera semper,*
*nunc mare, nunc leti mille repente viae.*

How well they used to live under the rule of Saturn, before the earth was opened up into long roads! Not yet had the pine tree scorned the dark waves, and offered billowing canvas to the winds, nor had the wandering sailor, seeking profit in unknown lands, weighed down his ship with foreign wares. At that time the sturdy bull did not go under the yoke, the horse did not champ bits in its tamed mouth, no home had doors, there was no stone planted in the countryside to rule the fields with set boundaries. The oaks themselves used to put forth honey, and of their own accord the ewes used to bring udders full of milk to their carefree owners. There were no armies, no anger, no wars, and the cruel craftsman had hammered out no sword by his pitiless skill. As things stand, under Jupiter's lordship there are slaughter and wounds without end; now we have the sea, now suddenly a thousand ways to death.

The conception of the Golden Age here is much closer to that later displayed in the opening book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* than it is to the panegyrical presentation of the same theme in the fourth *Eclogue*.[25]

[25] On Tibullus' treatment of the Golden Age here, see especially J. K. Newman, '*Saturno Rege*: Themes of the Golden Age in Tibullus and Other Augustan Poets', in A. E. Radke (ed.), *Candide Iudex. Beiträge zur augusteischen Dichtung. Festschrift für Walter Wimmel zum 75. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1998), 225–46; A. M. Morelli, 'I "Saturnia regna" nell'elegia 1, 3 di Tibullo', *MD* 26 (1991), 175–89; Wifstrand Schiebe (n. 13), esp. 84–90; M. J. Bénéjam, 'L'âge d'or de Tibulle', in A. Thill (ed.), *L'Élégie romaine. Enracinement, thèmes, diffusion* (Paris, 1980), 91–103. For a further Tibullan description of the benefits of the Golden Age, see Tib. 2.3.67–76, where at line 74 the speaker prays for the return of one aspect of that age, though not the age as a whole. *Eclogue* 4 is often invoked as a point of reference for Tibullus 2.5, where we find the words *Saturno rege fugato* (2.5.9), reference to the Sibyl (2.5.15), and an emphasis throughout

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The reign of Saturn took place in the remote past, and now seems beyond hope of recovery; as in Ovid, its blessings are to a large extent enumerated negatively, as the absence of undesirable features of the current dispensation.[26] Tibullus' use of the phrase *Saturno…rege* ('under the rule of Saturn', 1.3.35) might nonetheless invite comparison with the *Saturnia regna* of Virgil's poem (*Ecl.* 4.6); the lines on the absence of seafaring and agriculture in the elegist's vision of prelapsarian felicity share a number of items of vocabulary with verses on the same subject in the eclogue;[27] and the two positively expressed features of the Golden Age here – oaks producing honey, and obliging dairy provision on the part of livestock – are recognizable as elements from the natural spontaneity of the world in response to the growth of the miraculous *puer* (*IPSAE MELLA dabant QUERCUS, ultroque FEREBANT / obvia securis UBERA LACTIS oves*, Tib. 1.3.45–6 ~ *durae QUERCUS sudabunt roscida MELLA*, *Ecl.* 4.30; *IPSAE LACTE domum reFERENT distenta capellae / UBERA*, *Ecl.* 4.21–2).[28] The evident parallels in expression between the two pieces, not to mention the variations clearly being introduced by Tibullus in his version of the subject (*dabant* for *sudabunt*, *oves* for *capellae*), serve to open up a dialogue between the elegiac utopia and the restored Golden Age of Virgil's pastoral, an exchange with possible political implications. For the elegiac lover-poet, the reign of Saturn is firmly consigned to the past, and stands in antithesis to the present age of truculence and travel, in keeping with his antipathy throughout the collection to warfare and violence (see also Tib. 1.1.73–8, 1.10). The self-consciously disreputable speaker of the elegies (see e.g. Tib. 1.1.53–8) not only disavows the warrior's calling, but also suggests that the fabulous age of peace and prosperity proclaimed by

on the divine sponsorship of Apollo: see e.g. F. Cairns, *Tibullus. A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge, 1979), 85–6; Miller (n. 2), 260–5.

[26] On this recurring feature of descriptions of the Golden Age, see e.g. Levin (n. 4), esp. 10–11, 19–20, 177.

[27] *pinus*, Tib. 1.3.37 / *Ecl.* 4.38; *navita*, Tib. 1.3.40 ~ *nautica*, *Ecl.* 4.38; *merce*, Tib. 1.3.40 ~ *merces*, *Ecl.* 4.39; *subiit iuga…taurus*, Tib. 1.3.41 ~ *tauris iuga solvit*, *Ecl.* 4.41. Particularly in the last instance, the coincidence between line numbers in the two poems suggests the possibility here of 'stichometric intertextuality' (on which see e.g. S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext. Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* [Cambridge, 1998], 92 n. 80; D. Lowe, 'Women Scorned: A New Stichometric Allusion in the *Aeneid*', *CQ* n.s. 63 [2013], 442–5). Morelli (n. 25), 180, remarks 'Il brano sull'età dell'oro in Verg. *Ecl.* 4 costituisce il termine di riferimento essenziale per Tibull. 1, 3, 35 ss.'

[28] For the parallels see commentators *ad locc.*; Zanker (n. 13), 500 with n. 17; and for discussion see now also N. Gutt, 'Tibulls Elegie 1,3 als "Antwort" auf Vergils 4. Ekloge? Perspektiven für eine transtextuelle Deutung', *Eisodos* (2016), 17–27.

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Virgil has failed to materialize. Trade, seafaring, and war still go on; the mythical improbabilities of Virgilian prophecy remain precisely that – possible only in a vanished, irrecoverable past. The degradation of the present is too far advanced to be reversed by politically motivated platitudes, and the apparent optimism of the fourth *Eclogue* is replaced by a bleaker vision of contemporary realities.[29]

The exuberant predictions of the eclogue are once again qualified, though from a rather different standpoint, in a later, more ceremonial Augustan context. At Augustus' *ludi saeculares* of 17 BC, a festival held specifically to celebrate the inauguration of a new *saeculum*, a significant element in the proceedings was the performance of Horace's *Carmen saeculare*, commissioned for the occasion.[30] In view of the theme of the festivities, we might expect the accompanying hymn to be imbued with more than a faint aura of Virgil's verses on the renewal of *saeclorum. . .ordo* (*Ecl.* 4.5; see also 4.52, *venturo. . .saeclo*); it has even been speculated that had Virgil not died two years earlier, he would have been the *princeps*' first choice for the commission.[31] Whatever the truth of that, there are a number of places in Horace's hymn where comparison appears to be invited with the language and subject matter of the fourth *Eclogue*:[32] we have an invocation to the Parcae (*Carm. saec.* 25–8), with terminology recalling that of *Ecl.* 4.46–7; mention is made of Lucina, goddess of childbirth (*Carm. saec.* 15; cf. *Ecl.* 4.10); the new age is associated with Apollo as its tutelary deity (*Carm. saec.* 1, 34; cf. *Ecl.* 4.10); and the fertility of the earth (*tellus*) is a prominent motif (*Carm. saec.* 29; cf. *Ecl.* 4.19, 39). But recognition of the similarities evoked by these features serves rather to point up the differences between the two poems, as Duncan Barker has demonstrated.[33] While Horace follows Virgil in emphasizing the theme of

[29] Wallace-Hadrill (n. 13), 21, argues of *Eclogue* 4 that 'One should not mistake the tone of the poem for one of optimism. . .The *Eclogue*, professedly hopeful, offers only fantasy'; if so, Tibullus' implied caricature of the celebratory tone of his model may be tendentious.

[30] See esp. D. Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome. Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs* (Cambridge, 1998), 28–40; M. C. J. Putnam, *Horace's Carmen Saeculare. Ritual Magic and the Poet's Art* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2000); A. Barchiesi, 'The Uniqueness of the *Carmen Saeculare* and Its Tradition', in A. J. Woodman and D. Feeney (eds.), *Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace* (Cambridge, 2002), 107–23.

[31] See e.g. D. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar. Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley, CA, and Los Angeles, CA, 2007), 133; H. Mattingly, 'Virgil's Fourth Eclogue', *JWI* 10 (1947), 17–18.

[32] See D. Barker, '"The Golden Age Is Proclaimed"? The *Carmen Saeculare* and the Renascence of the Golden Race', *CQ* n.s. 46 (1996), 438–41.

[33] Barker (n. 32); see also Feeney (n. 31), 133–4; Putnam (n. 30), 118–22.

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natural abundance, his vision confines itself to circumstances that might be thought realistically possible, in distinct contrast to the exotic hyperbole and mythological extravagances of the eclogue;[34] indeed, his studied practicality begins to sound almost Soviet in the infamous prayer at *Carmen saeculare* 17–20 for the goddess of childbirth to 'prosper the decrees of the Fathers concerning the yoking of women and the marriage law fertile in new progeny' (*patrum. . . / prosperes decreta super iugandis / feminis prolisque novae feraci / lege marita*). This *proles nova* ('new progeny') is emphatically not the celestial *nova progenies* of *Ecl.* 4.7; and, although Horace's immediately preceding prayer implores *diva, producas subolem* ('goddess, may you bring forth offspring', *Carm. saec.* 17), it is clear that the offspring in question is to be imagined as rather more mundane in its nature and ancestry than the *cara deum suboles* ('dear offspring of gods') addressed at *Ecl.* 4.49, who 'will take on the life of the gods' (*deum vitam accipiet*, 4.15).

This process of drawing the reader in to expect a repeat of the fourth *Eclogue* before staging a revisionary withdrawal from Virgil's messianic excesses is most strikingly enacted precisely where Horace's expression becomes most figurative. In the parade of personifications returning to earth at the turn of the new *saeculum*, as Barker notes, we find not the Greek maiden symbolizing Justice, but 'the return of a host of Roman virtues – Fides, Pax, Honos, Pudor and Virtus' (*Carm. saec.* 57–60):[35]

> *iam Fides et Pax et Honos Pudorque*
> *priscus et neglecta redire Virtus*
> *audet, apparetque beata pleno*
> *Copia cornu.* 60

Now Faith and Peace and Honour and ancient Modesty and forsaken Virtue dare to return, and blessed Plenty appears with her full horn.

In the wake of the feminine singular ending of *neglecta* and the mention of returning (*redire*, cf. *Ecl.* 4.6), the reader who has been

[34] See Barker (n. 32), 445: 'The *Carmen Saeculare*. . .may be read as specifically rejecting the mystical plenty of the *Eclogue*. For such plenty it substitutes a prayer for the conventional fertility of the earth, which discounts both the fantastic and the luxurious'; also Galinsky (n. 13), 102–5; Zanker (n. 13), 504–8; R. F. Thomas (ed.), *Horace. Odes Book IV and Carmen Saeculare* (Cambridge, 2011), 59 ('No room here for corn spontaneously yellowing in the fields, wine running freely in channels, or sheep dyeing themselves on hillsides of Italy').

[35] Barker (n. 32), 445; on these lines see also *ibid.*, 442, and Putnam (n. 30), 119–20, interpreting the repeated *iam* ('now') of *Carm. saec.* 53 and 57 as an echo of the same repetition in *Ecl.* 4.6–7.

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attuned to Horace's Virgilian subtext by echoes of *Eclogue* 4 earlier in the *Carmen* might reasonably expect, on reaching the penultimate syllable of line 58, to find a declaration of the return of *Virgo*, as in the sixth line of Virgil's poem. But the final syllable of the line suddenly reveals the personification in question to be not *Vir-go*, but *Vir-tus* – not the mythological, female, Greek abstraction of Virgil's messianic reverie, but the thoroughly male (though not, of course, grammatically masculine), Roman quality of Virtus, manliness.[36] In the space of one syllable, what had looked like a simple rehash of Virgilian material is drastically repositioned on the spectrum of both nationality and gender politics: the manly Roman revival under Augustus supersedes the imported virginal mysticism of Virgil's earlier prophecy. As one would expect in the context of the *ludi saeculares*, Horace's picture of the new *saeculum* serves to endorse the Augustan settlement, but its engagement with the theme of the turn of the age presents a very different conception of the incipient era from the esoteric eschatology of the fourth *Eclogue*, the oriental flavour of which might have been thought to sit uncomfortably with the tenor of Augustus' presentation of his rule in the years following his victory at Actium.[37]

Horatian ambivalence towards the wonders of the Virgilian Golden Age may be detected once more in the final book of the *Odes*. Here, in the second poem of the collection, Horace contemplates the possibility of a return *in aurum. . .priscum* ('to ancient gold', 4.2.39–40) and sets this in relation to the reign of Augustus – but in a way that indicates that he does not regard these two phenomena as commensurate or equivalent. The grand Pindaric poet Iullus Antonius, says Horace, will sing of Caesar (*Odes* 4.2.37–40),

> *quo nihil maius meliusve terris*
> *fata donavere bonique divi*

[36] See Putnam (n. 30), 120; Zanker (n. 13), 505 ('the return of the Virgin in Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* is echoed by the return of the Virtues in Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*'); Thomas (n. 34), 80 ('extravagant language, with a hint at, but ultimately with studious avoidance of, the terminology of Virgil's returning golden age at *Ecl.* 4.6'). On Roman *virtus*, see especially W. Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana* (Munich, 1973); C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), 20–2, and index s.v. *virtus*; M. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness. Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge and New York, 2006).

[37] On the orientalism of the fourth *Eclogue*, see R. G. M. Nisbet, 'Virgil's Fourth Eclogue: Easterners and Westerners', *BICS* 25 (1978), 59–78 (repr. in Nisbet, *Collected Papers on Latin Literature*, ed. S. J. Harrison [Oxford, 1995], 47–75).

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*nec dabunt, quamvis redeant in aurum*
*tempora priscum.* 40

than whom the fates and kindly gods have given to the world nothing greater or better – nor will they, though the times return to ancient gold.

If there is an evocation here of the fourth *Eclogue*,[38] Horace's treatment of the theme of the returning Golden Age nonetheless diverges significantly from its manifestation in the earlier poem. The reversion of the times to ancient gold is characterized not as an incipient process or a definite prospect for the future, but as a hypothetical scenario – and in any case its fulfilment would make little difference, since the status of Augustus as the gods' greatest gift to earth remains unaffected.[39] Emphatically, then, the prognostications of the eclogue have been rendered irrelevant by the surpassing greatness of the Augustan present; the colourful mythology of *ultima Cumaei...carminis aetas* ('the final age of Cumaean song', *Ecl.* 4.4) has given way to the radiant reality of *tua, Caesar, aetas* ('your age, Caesar', *Odes* 4.15.4), as Horace puts it in the final ode of his book.[40]

## Conclusion

Passages such as these demonstrate that among Virgil's own generation the fourth *Eclogue* was already an established point of reference for writers seeking to fit the events of their own time into a broader historical scheme, and thereby to reflect on the present political situation.[41] It can be seen, moreover, that Virgil's contemporaries – unlike much later use

[38] See H. C. Baldry, 'Who Invented the Golden Age?', *CQ* n.s. 2 (1952), 88: 'This looks like an echo of Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, but the reference is too slight to give any clear indication of the source of its thought'; Cucchiarelli (n. 8), 250 on *Ecl.* 4.6 ('una significativa rivisitazione dell'ecloga 4'); also Zanker (n. 13), 509 n. 46.

[39] See Zanker (n. 13), 508–9.

[40] On the relationship between *Eclogue* 4 and *Odes* 4.15, see further M. C. J. Putnam, *Artifices of Eternity. Horace's Fourth Book of Odes* (Ithaca, 1986), 287–91; Zanker (n. 13), 509–10. Note in particular the 'stichometric intertextuality' (on which see above, n. 27) of *aetas* at the end of the fourth line of each poem; the two passages are compared by B. W. Breed, '*Tua, Caesar, aetas*: Horace *Ode* 4.15 and the Augustan Age', *AJPh* 125 (2004), 248 (see also Du Quesnay [n. 1], 60: 'The relationship of the *puer* to his *aetas* is clearly thought of in the same way as the relationship of Augustus to his *aetas*').

[41] See Putnam (n. 40), 287: 'Many of the major poems of the Augustan era comment on this manifesto'. On the limitations of the poem for interpreting the general cultural milieu of the Augustan age, note, however, Galinsky (n. 13), 93: 'the fourth *Eclogue* cannot be considered as a programmatic matrix of things to come and as being so influential, at Augustus' own time (as opposed to later ages), that it would allow us to use it as a frame of reference for aspects ranging from imagery in art to the ideology of the ruler'.

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of the poem for the purposes of panegyric – do not mechanically recycle the language and imagery of the eclogue to fit the generic demands of courtly commendation, but engage in intricate dialogue with its thought and expression, effecting creative variations on the themes and terminology of this already influential and adaptable poetic prototype.

Thus began the long tradition of appropriating Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* for the purposes of political panegyric. Over the next millennium and a half the practice would extend to every corner of Europe,[42] and later on it was to spread yet further, as acclamation of *novus ordo saeclorum* became a staple element in the articulation of the political aspirations of the emerging United States.[43] It may be that the very opacity of expression which has made the original historical implications of the poem so difficult to determine, combined with the absence of specific contemporary detail, has played some part in its durability as a source of congratulatory quotations and a model for appropriative adaptation.[44] A complete history of the fortunes of this remarkable poem would touch on many different branches of Western culture, and would span almost every historical period; but the foundations of this edifice were laid even before Virgil's death, and it is with these early responses – a number of them destined to exert a significant impact in their own right – that any survey of the prodigious afterlife enjoyed by this enigmatic but perennially compelling text must begin.

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[42] On later panegyrical (and other) appropriations, see esp. P. G. Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula. Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne, 1994), 209–13; F. A. de Armas, *The Return of Astraea. An Astral-Imperial Myth in Calderón* (Lexington, KY, 1986); G. Costa, *La leggenda dei secoli d'oro nella letteratura italiana* (Bari, 1972); Levin (n. 4); Mähl (n. 13), 99–102; W. L. Grant, 'A Classical Theme in Neo-Latin', *Latomus* 16 (1957), 690–706. Still later examples are considered by G. Binder, 'Goldene Zeiten: immer wieder wird ein Messias geboren… Beispiele neuzeitlicher Aneignung der 4. Ekloge Vergils', in T. Burkard, M. Schauer, and C. Wiener (eds.), *Vestigia Vergiliana. Vergil-Rezeption in der Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York, 2010), 51–72.

[43] Hardie (n. 17), 1. On *Eclogue* 4 in early American political discourse, see also M. Reinhold, *Classica Americana. The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit, MI, 1984), 225, 229, 233, 238–9.

[44] See e.g. Du Quesnay (n. 1), 84: 'because it concentrates on the emotions of the occasion rather than on historical facts it transcends the moment to become of universal and perennial interest'.

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