

‘THE GOLDEN AGE IS PROCLAIMED’? THE *CARMEN SAECULARE* AND THE RENASCENCE OF THE GOLDEN RACE*

The idea of a returning golden age (or, more properly, a renascent golden race¹) is widely understood and commonly presented both as a staple of Augustan propaganda and as a pervasive aspiration of Augustan society. The *Carmen Saeculare*—an official commission for a public festival—is presented as a means by which the regime proclaimed to an enthusiastic populace the imminent renaissance of the golden race. The aim of this article is to draw attention both to the *failure* of the *Carmen Saeculare* explicitly to proclaim the renaissance of the race, and to the critique implicit in the poem of the very idea of a renaissance. The golden race, according to this reading, might be undesirable on account of its very *goldenness*. The golden race was the subject of a complex myth at the centre of a complex discourse: neither the ‘official’ nor the popular response to the idea of its return can have been as simple as they are frequently portrayed.

I. THE *CARMEN SAECULARE* AND THE GOLDEN RACE

The *Carmen Saeculare* is commonly read as a proclamation of a returning golden race such as was first described by Hesiod as existing in virtue and happiness under the rule of Kronos (*Works and Days* 106ff.). This much is assumed in the following passage, from Zanker’s *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, which introduces a discussion of the *Ludi Saeculares* alongside other themes of plenty under the general heading ‘*AUREA AETAS*’:

After ten years of religious and moral renewal, the festivals and sacrifices, buildings and images, now visible everywhere in Rome, began to take effect. Confidence in the ability of the restored Republic to stand firm and faith in its ruler grew apace. Attempts to overthrow him had failed, his military prowess had been tested against the Cantabri and Parthians, and the peace within

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The following works are referred to by author’s name alone below:

H. C. Baldry, ‘Who Invented the Golden Age?’, *CQ* n.s. 2 (1952), 83–92.

E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957).

K. Galinsky, ‘Some Aspects of Ovid’s Golden Age’, *GB* 10 (1981) 193–205.

B. Gatz, *Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen* (*Spudasmata* 16; Hildesheim, 1967).

P. A. Johnston, *Vergil’s Agricultural Golden Age: a Study of the Georgics* (*Mnemosyne* suppl. 60; Leiden, 1980).

I. B. Pighi, *De Ludis Saecularibus Populi Romani Quiritium* (Amsterdam, 1965).

M. C. J. Putnam, *Artifices of Eternity: Horace’s Fourth Book of Odes* (Cornell, 1986).

I. S. Ryberg, ‘Vergil’s Golden Age’, *TAPA* 89 (1958), 112–31.

P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, tr. A. Shapiro (Ann Arbor, 1988).

¹ I employ the formula ‘golden race’ in most instances, in preference to the more familiar ‘golden age’, the better to preserve the genetic element in the terms γένος, gens, saeculum/saecula and aetas.

Rome had proved itself a stable one. The successes of the new regime had had an impact on every individual. It was now time to give permanent expression to this mood of optimism, to create a new imagery that would transcend reality and eternalize the happiness of the present moment. The state needed a myth, and here again Augustus was able to latch onto something that was already in the air before he came along. For years people had fantasized about the imminent dawning of a new 'Saturnian' age of happiness. Another comet was expected in the year 17 B.C., so what better time simply to proclaim that the long awaited new *saeculum* had arrived? From May 30 to June 3 the great Secular Games took place, heralding the beginning of the new age.²

Zanker presents the process of commissioning and performance of the *Carmen* as the manipulation by Augustus of a popular aspiration for what he terms a "'Saturnian" age of happiness'; the purpose of the *Ludi Saeculares* of 17 B.C. becomes the welcoming of this age, and so the festival is discussed by Zanker under the simple rubric, 'The Golden Age Is Proclaimed'.³ Other writers too see the returning golden race as at once a centrepiece of Augustan propaganda and an object of popular enthusiasm. So to Commager, the *Carmen* is an analogue of the sixteenth *Epode*, in which the 'Golden Time (*tempus aureum*)' sought in the *Epode* in the Isles of the Blest is discovered to exist in Rome itself;⁴ and to Johnston, the *Carmen* 'celebrates the achievement under Augustus of a golden age, along with the virtues which were lost as the metallic ages deteriorated'.⁵ Most recently, Putnam, in a passage very reminiscent of Zanker's, presents the *Carmen* as announcing, in the wake of peace and moral renewal, 'that Rome was on the threshold of a renewed golden age'.⁶ The phrase 'golden age' is used by modern scholars with a very broad signification, covering, ultimately, prosperity of all kinds, even where there is no explicit reference to the Hesiodic myth. In this way, Alföldi was able to interpret every appearance of globes and *cornucopiae* on Augustan coins as a proclamation of the golden race,⁷ just as Zanker interprets the *Carmen Saeculare* and, thereafter, every representation of plenty.⁸

What is—or, perhaps, should be—surprising, then, is that there is no unambiguous reference to the golden age either in the *Carmen Saeculare* itself, or in Zanker's description of the ritual of the *Ludi Saeculares*. There is no mention, for example, of the reign, still less of the person, of Kronos/Saturnus, no mystically prolific earth, and no metallic races; nor is there any mention of gold itself, except in the golden boxes which held the Sibylline verses in the temple of Palatine Apollo. Equally, references to the golden race are entirely absent both from the *Acta* of the Augustan *Ludi Saeculares*, discovered near the Tiber in 1890, and from the Sibylline prophecy

² Zanker 167. See the review by A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Rome's Cultural Revolution', *JRS* 79 (1989), 157–64.

³ Zanker 167–72. The rubrics are different in the original German edition (*Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* [Munich, 1987], 171)—the introductory paragraph has no rubric to itself, and the section on the *Ludi Saeculares* is preceded by the rubric 'AUREA AETAS', for which Shapiro substitutes 'The Golden Age Is Proclaimed'—but the implications for the *Ludi Saeculares* and the *Carmen Saeculare* are the same. Horace's commission is attested in Suetonius' *Vita Horati* and also in the *Acta* of the Augustan *Ludi Saeculares* (149), most accessibly presented with other documents relating to the *Ludi Saeculares* by Pighi 107–19: *carmen composuit Q. Horatius Flaccus*. See also Horace, *Odes* 4.6, which treats of the composition of the *Carmen Saeculare*, with Putnam 115–30.

⁴ S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace, a Critical Study* (New Haven, 1962), 223.

⁵ Johnston 78–9.

⁶ Putnam 16.

⁷ A. Alföldi, 'Der neue Weltenherrscher der vierten Ekloge Vergils', *Hermes* 45 (1930), 369–84. Galinsky 193, n. 2, is right to describe Alföldi's assumption as 'arguable' but, having done so, need not himself find any reference specifically to the golden age in the statue of Augustus from Prima Porta.

⁸ Zanker 172–92.

circulated at the time and preserved by Zosimus and Phlegon.⁹ Both *Ludi* and *Carmen* clearly fail to meet explicitly the expectations raised of them by Zanker. In the light of this failure, we are justified in asking whether, and in what sense, the *Carmen Saeculare* might be read as proclaiming the return of the Hesiodic golden race.

The universal use of the label 'golden age' is perhaps misleading and implies an implausible universality of thought among Augustan Romans. Certainly, if we call all aspirations towards greater prosperity hopes of a golden age, then the vast majority of Romans at one time or another are likely to have shared the aspiration. But in the vast majority of Augustan literature, at least, as in the *Carmen Saeculare*, such aspirations are not couched in terms of a golden age or race. The question then arises whether Romans might have distinguished between the plenty of the golden age and other sorts of plenty, or whether the golden age was implied even where it was not mentioned explicitly. And if Romans did distinguish, how did they distinguish? What was different about the plenty of a golden age or race? Such questions are important to our understanding of a text such as the *Carmen Saeculare* which, while it makes veiled reference to elements of the myth of the golden race, never explicitly proclaims its return.

In attempting to provide answers to these questions, one should bear in mind that in the myth of the golden age one is confronted less by a fixed symbol than by a mobile discourse—that is, by a composite of different positions taken by different Romans at different times around the idea of a returning golden race. Recent work on Augustan propaganda rightly directs our attention away from its transmitters to its receivers, and this new emphasis on the reception of propaganda—the reading or hearing of texts and the viewing of monuments and ceremonies—serves to highlight a potential multiplicity of readings, hearings and viewings.¹⁰ Work specifically on the golden age has also come to stress the myth's diversity. We can no longer say that in the Augustan Age, 'the myth of the Golden Age stopped developing and became a fixed poetic, political, and philosophical symbol';¹¹ rather, we must agree that the concept 'had become a complex and variegated one', and so remained.¹² The length and scope of Bodo Gatz's painstaking history of the myth imply a mutability which persisted throughout the Augustan period and beyond, and this mutability is easily detectable even within the oeuvres of individual authors.¹³ The very range of interrelated discourses incorporated in that of the golden age—discourses on peace and militarism, virtue and happiness, the earth and agriculture—was such that no Roman can have assented to that whole nexus of ideas simultaneously. Insofar as the myth continued to be re-presented, so the discourse of the golden race became more rather than less complex under Augustus, and, as it did so, the idea of a returning golden race is likely to have become morally more and more ambiguous.

⁹ Zosimus 2.5; Phlegon, *περὶ μακροβίων*. The prophecy is published alongside related documents by Pighi 55–58, as are the *Acta*, *CIL* VI 32323.

¹⁰ See, for example, on Latin literature, D. C. Feeney, 'Si licet et fas est: Ovid's *Fasti* and the Problem of Free Speech under the Principate', in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (Bristol, 1992), 1–25, and D. F. Kennedy, "'Augustan'" and "'anti-Augustan'": Reflections on Terms of Reference', *ibid.*, 26–58. On Roman art, see J. Elsner, 'Cult and Sacrifice: Sacrifice on the Ara Pacis Augustae', *JRS* 81 (1991), 50–61.

¹¹ K. J. Reckford, 'Some Appearances of the Golden Age', *CJ* 44 (1958), 79–87, at p. 79.

¹² Galinsky 193.

¹³ As has been shown in Vergil's case by Ryberg and Johnston. But J. J. L. Smolenaars, 'Labour in the golden age: a unifying theme in Vergil's poems', *Mnemosyne* 40 (1987), 391–405, argues—not entirely plausibly—that there is a greater degree of consistency in Vergil's treatment of the reign of Saturnus.

What might seem remarkable, if the return of the golden race is taken as a commonly used and widely understood symbol of popular hopes of the Augustan regime, is that explicit proclamations of its return are restricted to two passages from a single poet. References to a golden race existing in the distant past are fairly frequent in Augustan literature,¹⁴ but for the idea that Augustan Romans perceived the race as both nascent and desirable, we have only the famous passages in Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* (which is pre-Augustan), and in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. In the *Eclogue*, Vergil proclaims the return of the *aurea gens* in association with the life of a child born during the consulship of Pollio, in 40 B.C.; at *Aen.* 6.791–807, Augustus is named by the ghost of Anchises as *conditor* of the *aurea saecula* in Latian fields once ruled by Saturnus. To these may be added the proclamation which may be said to be implicit in the *Georgics*, where the designation of Italy as *Saturnia tellus*, alongside repeated play on Hesiodic imagery, implies a special connection between Italy, the Augustan present and the golden race.¹⁵ With a single exception—Ovid's, at *Ars Amatoria* 2.277–8, to which I shall return—these are the only proclamations of the return of the golden race contemporary with Octavian/Augustus; without exception, they are the only proclamations which might conceivably be read as enthusiastic. Other Augustan treatments of the golden race constitute not proclamations in themselves but engagements in discourse with Vergil's proclamations. Galinsky (p. 193) has drawn our attention to how little we know of Augustus' own attitude towards the golden race and its return: about the mass of Augustus' contemporaries we must confess ourselves equally ignorant. There are reasons for assuming certain expectations to have been raised in the *Carmen*'s audience by their previous knowledge of Vergilian texts: but this is not to say that either Horace or his audience ultimately interpreted the *Carmen* in exclusively Vergilian terms.

II. THE *LUDI SAECULARES* AND THE *AUREA SAECULA*

The failure of the *Carmen Saeculare* to offer any clear proclamation of the return of the golden race is the more striking in that much the same expectations that Zanker raises for his readers concerning the *Ludi Saeculares* are likely to have been raised in some Roman minds by Vergil's proclamations of the return of the race. In the fourth *Eclogue* and the *Aeneid*, Vergil draws together and confuses the Hesiodic myth of the metallic races with the native Italian system by which time was divided into *saecula*—'generations'—each lasting 110 years.¹⁶ The coming of the new *saeculum* is made the occasion of the return of the golden race, and the *Ludi Saeculares*, the welcoming-party of the race.

The fourth *Eclogue* appears to have been written at a time when a new *saeculum* seemed imminent. The previous *saeculum* had been welcomed in 149 B.C.; the next was due in 40 B.C., the year of Pollio's consulship. According to Servius (ad *Ecl.* 9.46), the Etruscan diviner Volcatius had prophesied the coming that year of the tenth and last of Rome's *saecula*—the *saeculum* of Apollo Helios. But in the *Eclogue*, the new *saeculum* is presented not as the beginning of the end, but as a new beginning in itself. The 'last age of Cumaean song (*ultima Cumaei... carminis aetas*)' (4) is the age in which the 'great sequence of *saecula* is born afresh (*magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo*)' (5). Alongside the *saecula*, there is born the child with whom will

¹⁴ For a list of passages, see Gatz 222–3.

¹⁵ On Hesiodic imagery in Vergil's *Georgics*, see Johnston *passim*.

¹⁶ On the *saecula* and their length, see Pighi 3–25.

return the Hesiodic golden race—the *aurea gens*, and alongside the golden race, there return the Virgin (*Virgo*—to whom I shall return) and Saturnus, with whom Apollo will somehow share rule in a composite *saeculum*-cum-golden age (6–10).¹⁷

Owing, as it appears, to the political upheaval and civil wars consequent on the death of Caesar, there was no festival celebrated until Augustus held it in 17 B.C. But if, in the meantime, Vergil's readers had forgotten the association constructed in the *Eclogue* between the *saeculum* and the golden age, they would have been reminded of it in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. Here, the ghost of Anchises introduces Augustus to Aeneas as the man 'who again will found in Latium, once ruled by Saturnus, the golden *saecula* (*aurea condet | saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arua | Saturno quondam*)' (792–4). Moreover, here the identification between the *saeculum* and the golden race is even more intimately drawn. The word which Anchises uses for the race, to translate the Greek γένος, is not the cognate *gens* of the *Eclogue* nor the equally cognate *genus*, which Cicero had used for the race at *de Natura Deorum* 2.159. Instead, he talks of the golden *saecula*—a word whose semantic field is sufficiently wide to translate γένος, but which necessarily bears additional associations. This formula, *aurea saecula*, which Vergil uses again at *Aeneid* 8.234–5, both mirrors and reinforces the identification made in the *Eclogue* between the golden race and the *saeculum*. The *Ludi Saeculares*, still awaited when Vergil died in 19 B.C., are now set up to inaugurate not just one, but a plurality of *aurea saecula*.

There existed, then, for Romans who knew their Vergil, the possibility of reading the *Ludi Saeculares*, when they were held in 17 B.C. as a proclamation of the golden age; it may even be that the association drawn by Vergil was so strong that any proclamation of the *saeculum* became automatically a proclamation of the golden age. This, I believe, is how Zanker's interpretation has been formed, and the experience of many of the Vergil-reading spectators may have been similar. Alternatively, however, the very strength of the expectation raised by Vergil may have emphasised by contrast the failure of the *Ludi* or the *Carmen* to offer a firm and explicit proclamation of the golden age. Vergilian language and thought—and in particular that of the fourth *Eclogue*—is certainly reflected in the *Carmen Saeculare*, but with emphasis on the specifically Saecular content of the *Eclogue*, and a noticeable avoidance or transformation of those elements pertaining specifically to the golden age.

As early as the first two stanzas of the *Carmen* (1–8), the reader's thoughts are potentially directed towards the fourth *Eclogue*:

Phoebe siluarumque potens Diana,
lucidum caeli decus, o colendi
semper et culti, date quae precamur
tempore sacro,

quo Sibyllini monuere uersus
uirgines lectas puerosque castos
dis quibus septem placuere colles
dicere carmen.

Phoebus and Diana powerful in the woods, the bright ornament of the heavens, always worshipped and always to be worshipped, grant what we pray at this sacred time, when the Sibylline verses have warned chosen maidens and chaste boys to sing a hymn for the gods who love the seven hills.

We might recognize a first reference to the fourth *Eclogue* in the *siluae* over which Diana is *potens*: apart from being a familiar haunt of the goddess of hunting (as in,

¹⁷ On the golden race in the fourth *Eclogue*, see especially Gatz 87–103.

e.g. Hor., *Odes* 1.21), woods potentially remind the reader of the 'woods worthy of a consul' (*siluae ... consule dignae*) which Vergil names as his theme in the *Eclogue* (4.3). A far stronger link between the poems is the prominence in both of Phoebus and Diana as joint patrons of the coming *saeculum*. Apollo Helios/Sol, we remember, was the deity identified by Volcatius as the patron of the new *saeculum*; and the Sibylline prophecy issued on the occasion of the *Ludi Saeculares* enjoins sacrifices to 'Phoebus Apollo who has also been called the Sun' (φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων, ὅστε καὶ Ἡέλιος κικλήσκεται, 16–17).¹⁸ What is of interest in comparing the *Carmen* and *Eclogue* is the very different roles played by Apollo and, more especially, by his sister Diana in the two poems. Diana's presence, being, perhaps, the more gratuitous—her role as patron appears to depend on her brother's—is the more revealing.

At *Eclogues* 4.10, Diana is invoked in the person of Lucina, patroness of childbirth: 'chaste Lucina, smile [on the baby's birth]: already your Apollo reigns' (*casta faue Lucina: tuus iam regnat Apollo*).¹⁹ In what way Apollo reigns is by no means clear, nor in what way he shares his reign with Saturnus, whose *regna* are said to return at verse 6: the confusion here reflects the amalgamation of golden age and *saeculum* in the *Eclogue*. Diana's role stems from the same amalgamation of ideas. As Lucina, she prospers the birth of the child 'with whom the iron race first shall cease and the golden arise over all the earth' (*quo ferrea primum | desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo*, 8–9). Whatever the child's precise relationship to the golden race, there is more involved here than simply the coming of a new *saeculum*.

The first six stanzas of the *Carmen*, the ninth and the last four—eleven, that is, of nineteen—are addressed to Apollo and Diana in one manifestation or another. True to Volcatius and the Sibyl, the solar aspect of Apollo and, consequently, the lunar aspect of Diana, are stressed: in the passage quoted above, the gods are invoked jointly as the 'bright ornament of heaven', and Apollo is invoked specifically as Sol at verse 9. What is perhaps more striking, however—both insofar as it constitutes a parallel with the fourth *Eclogue* and insofar as it denotes a change of tone from the *Eclogue*—is the new role accorded the goddess of childbirth at *Carmen Saeculare* 13–24:

rite maturos aperire partus
lenis, Ilithyia, tuere matres,
siue tu Lucina probas uocari
seu Genitalis:

diua, producas subolem, patrumque
prosperes decreta super iugandis
feminis prolisque nouae feraci
lege marita,

certus undenos decies per annos
orbis ut cantus referatque ludos
ter die claro totiensque grata
nocte frequentis.

O Ilithyia, merciful to bring forth duly births in their season, protect our mothers, whether you prefer to be addressed as Lucina or Genitalis. Goddess, rear our offspring and bless the decrees of the fathers on the wedding of women and the marriage-law destined to bear new offspring, so that the sure earth may bring again, after eleven times ten years, songs and games three times by clear day and teeming as often by welcome night.

¹⁸ Fraenkel 371–2 convincingly dismisses the possibility either that *lucidum ... decus* should be taken with Diana alone or that Apollo and Sol are to be understood as separate deities.

¹⁹ That Lucina here is Diana and not, as frequently, Iuno, is suggested by *tuus*.

Critics have wondered at the apparent banality of Horace's reference to the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* of 18 B.C., and argument about the passage has centred on Horace's skill and his audience's taste.²⁰ Banality, however, recognizable as such, may have a point here, given the contrast with the extraordinary content of the corresponding passage in the *Eclogue*. Here in the *Carmen*, the goddess is concerned not with one special child mystically linked to mystical plenty, but with the normal and continuing reproduction of the Roman people, looking towards the next *Ludi Saeculares*. Equally, it might be noted that Lucina is but one of three titles by which Diana might choose to be addressed: it is as if the *Carmen* gives the epithet Lucina, with its eclogic and therefore golden associations, only a one-in-three chance of divine approval.

Two characteristics of the *Carmen* are already apparent, both of which we shall see borne out later in the poem. First, there is the *Carmen*'s strict adherence to the matter of the *saeculum* as opposed to that of the golden age—the reference to the Sibylline books at verse 5, for example, exhibits none of the play in the *Eclogue*'s *Cumaeum carmen* (4) on Cumae, the home of the Sibyl, and Kyme, the birthplace of Hesiod: the *Carmen Saeculare* is to be precisely that—a Saecular song. Secondly, there is the *Carmen*'s concentration on prayers for the enhancement, within natural limits, of life as it was known, in opposition to the forecasts of miraculous transformation familiar from the *Eclogue*. This second characteristic becomes more apparent as we read further into the *Carmen*.

At *Carmen* 25–8, the Parcae are invoked:

uosque ueraces cecinisse, Parcae,
quod semel dictum stabilis per aeuum
terminus seruet, bona iam peractis
iungite fata.

And you, Parcae, truthful in your song, which, once ordained, a stable boundary will preserve throughout eternity, now join happy destinies to those already fulfilled.

Here the reader is directed to verses 46–7 of the *Eclogue*, themselves based on Catullus 64.²¹ The *Eclogue*, having described the mystical plenty enjoyed by the consummate golden race—no need for sailing, ploughing or dyeing in a landscape adorned with multi-coloured sheep—turns its own attention to the prophesying Parcae:

'talìa saecla' suis dixerunt 'currìte' fusi
concordes stabili fatorum numine Parcae.

'Weave saecula like these' said the Parcae to their spindles, unanimous by the stable *numen* of the Fates.

Commentators, when they have noted the correspondence, have taken the *Carmen*'s invocation of *ueraces cecinisse Parcae* as an endorsement of the *Eclogue*'s prophecy. To Johnston, for example, 'Horace seems to be saying that the golden age of Vergil's prophecy has come to pass' (p. 14, n. 10). But *ueraces* might be taken equally well as defining Horace's Parcae on the basis of their veracity and thereby distinguishing them from the less reliable Parcae of the *Eclogue*. The adjective *stabilis* is repeated,

²⁰ See Fraenkel 373–5.

²¹ In which the song of the Parcae (323–81) repeats the refrain *currìte ducentes subtegmina, currìte, fusi*.

but applied to a new noun, as part of a statement whose emphases are different from the *Eclogue*'s. The limits implied in *stabilis ... terminus* underline the *Carmen*'s stress on truth and, in particular, as we saw in the case of its reference to the *Lex Iulia* of 18 B.C., on reality as opposed to fantasy. There may even be good reason here to abandon Bentley's otherwise compelling emendation of the manuscripts' *dictum est stabilisque rerum* to *dictum stabilis per aeuum* in order to preserve the emphasis on reality in *stabilis ... rerum terminus* ('the stable boundary of things', or even, 'of reality').

Whatever Roman readers may have inferred from the above verses, Horace's declared hopes in the following stanza (29–32) are certainly very different from Vergil's. In place of the magic unreality of the *Eclogue*, we hear a very simple prayer for natural bounty:

fertilis frugum pecorisque tellus
spicea donet Cererem corona;
nutriant fetus et aquae salubres
et Iouis aurae.

Fruitful in crops and cattle, may Earth give Ceres a crown of corn; may wholesome waters and Iuppiter's breezes nourish her produce.

It is as if the *Carmen* alludes to the *Eclogue* only to say 'let's get real'. If the *Carmen* is going to proclaim a golden age, it will not be the fantastical age of Hesiod or Vergil, but one where the ordinary efforts of farmers will be especially but not excessively rewarded.

It is worth noting here that the rejection of mystical plenty does not *per se* imply the rejection of a renascent golden race: rather, the rejection of one Vergilian model of the golden race for another. In the *Georgics* and then in the *Aeneid*, we find a shift of emphasis onto the role of Saturnus both as patron of the golden race and, equally, as the ancient patron of Italian agriculture.²² A compromise, as it were, is made between the happiness of the golden race and the hard virtue of the Italian farmer—a compromise described by Johnston in terms of an 'agricultural golden age'.²³ So, for example, the *laudes Italiae* of *Georgics* 2 present a *Saturnia tellus* which approximates to Hesiodic Plenty without ever quite exceeding the bounds of reality;²⁴ and Augustus, at *Aeneid* 6. 703–6, is introduced as one who will restore the *aurea saecula* to *arua*—that is, to cultivated land—once ruled by Saturnus.

The question now for the reader of the *Carmen Saeculare* is whether Horace can be said to be offering an 'agricultural golden age' akin to Vergil's. Like Vergil, Horace offers agricultural plenty in the new *saeculum* but, unlike Vergil, neither alludes to Saturnus as patron of the *saeculum* nor describes the *saeculum* as 'golden'. Ultimately, it remains an open question whether the silence of the *Carmen* connotes acquiescence in the Vergilian model or the rejection of it. However, if we read on a few stanzas, we find in the text a hint that the goodness of the new *saeculum* might

²² On the mythological history of Saturnus, see Johnston 62–89.

²³ To Johnston (48), the *Georgics* mark a shift in Vergil's conception of the 'golden age' 'from a time of mortal happiness based upon unlimited leisure to a time of satisfaction and joy achieved through thought and toil'. On the variations in the Vergilian treatment of the myth, see also Ryberg, and Galinsky 194.

²⁴ *Georgics* 2.136–76. I see no reason to take as definitive the stark reading of R. F. Thomas, *Virgil, Georgics* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1988), ad loc., that every deviation from the Hesiodic model implies an undermining of Italy's claim to be the *Saturnia tellus*.

have been read as depending precisely on its *not* experiencing the return of the golden race; and that what is at stake might be precisely the *goldenness* of the golden race.

III. THE GOLDEN RACE AND GOLD

Having expressed a desire for agricultural plenty, the *Carmen* renews its invocation of Phoebus and Diana; at 33–52, reflection on Roman and Julio-Claudian myth-history gives way to prayers for the present and, in particular, to prayers that Augustus' own prayers be heard. In the following two stanzas (53–60) are listed the achievements of the Princesps:

iam mari terraque manus potentis
Medus Albanasque timet securis,
iam Scythae responsa petunt superbi
nuper et Indi.

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

Already by land and sea the Median fears his powerful forces and Alban axes; already the Scythians and Indians, recently proud, are asking for our answers. Already Faith and Peace and Honour and original Modesty and neglected Manliness dare to return, and blessed Plenty appears with a full horn.

In these lines are to be found both the nearest thing in the *Carmen* to an explicit allusion to the golden race and, at the same time, a second allusion which may be read as casting doubt on the desirability of a renascent golden race precisely on account of its goldenness.

The repeated word 'already'—*iam*—and the returning virtues—*Fides*, *Honos*, *Pax*, *Pudor* and *Virtus*—draw our attention once again to the fourth *Eclogue*. In the *Eclogue*, the 'last age of Cumaean song' is said to be coming 'already' (*iam*, 4); 'already' (*iam*) comes the Virgin (6); and 'already' (*iam*), there is sent down a 'new brood' (*noua progenies*, 7). The Virgin (*Virgo*) is the constellation Virgo, identified by Aratus with Justice—*Δίκη*—who fled the earth on the death of the silver race, as Hesiod's *Αἰδώς* and *Νέμεσις* had fled at the death of the iron.²⁵ As the return of Aratus' Virgo in the *Eclogue* brings back the golden race, so perhaps the return of Horace's virtues constitutes at last a proclamation of the golden age? But as the reader's expectations are raised, so again they are met by silence: where Vergil links the return of Virgo specifically with the return of the reign of Saturnus—*iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna*—Horace lists his own returning virtues only to fall silent about the golden race. Where the *Saturnia regna* return in the *Eclogue*, they are replaced in the *Carmen Saeculare* by 'blessed Plenty' (*beata Copia*), complete with her brimming horn.

In the substitution of *beata Copia* for *Saturnia regna*, there is the beginning of a solution to the enigma of the *Carmen*'s silence concerning the golden age. Firstly, we are reminded of the substitution earlier in the *Carmen* of a realistic vision of plenty for the mystic abundance enjoyed by the *Eclogue*'s golden race: so here again, the *Saturnia regna* are replaced by a Plenty shorn of fantastical associations with the

²⁵ Aratus, *Phaenomena* 96–136; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 197–201.

golden race. Secondly, and relatedly, we are directed by blessed Plenty to an earlier Horatian treatment of abundance, in the first book of *Epistles*, and directed in turn by this treatment to think of the metaphorical goldenness of the golden race in association with the less desirable aspects of the physical metal, gold.

Verses 53–60 of the *Carmen* mirror the coda of *Epistles* 1. 12 (25–9), in which Horace had described events as seen from Rome to Iccius, the procurator of Agrippa's estates in Sicily:

ne tamen ignores quo sit Romana loco res,
Cantaber Agrippae, Claudii uirtute Neronis
Armenius cecidit; ius imperiumque Phraates
Caesaris accepit genibus minor; aurea fruges
Italiae pleno defundit Copia cornu.

But, so that you may know what the news is at Rome: The Cantabrian has fallen to the manliness of Agrippa, the Armenian to that of Claudius Nero; Phraates on his knees has accepted the rule and empire of Caesar; golden Plenty is pouring forth her fruits into Italy from a full horn.

Like the *Carmen*, the *Epistle* recites a list of the diplomatic and military successes of the Augustan regime, which culminates in the activity of Copia, who is in both poems equipped with a full horn—*pleno cornu*. As the words *Copia cornu* end the hexameter line and the *Epistle* itself, so they conclude the sapphic stanza of the *Carmen*. The striking difference between the two passages—apart from the *Carmen*'s returning virtues—is that whereas Copia in the *Carmen* is blessed, in the *Epistle* she is golden. And the goldenness of Copia, in the context of the *Epistle*, is such as to render her morally dubious.

Epistles 1. 12 falls firmly within the discourse of luxury: its central theme is the relationship of *fruges*—that is, crops, vegetation, the necessary stuff of life—and *fructus*—that is, crops but also mineral, monetary, excessive and corruptive wealth, as represented by gold. The poem begins with the word *fructibus*, which alludes both to the Sicilian cornlands exploited for Agrippa by Iccius and to the monetary wealth he wins from them.²⁶ In the second line, Horace tells Iccius that he could ask for nothing better than these *fructus*—no greater *copia*—‘if only you use them properly’ (*si recte frueris*). ‘If, perhaps,’ Horace continues, ‘in the middle of [riches] within reach, you live more austerely on vegetables and nettles, you will go on living like that, even if the fluid stream of Fortune were suddenly to gild you’ (*si forte in medio positorum abstemius herbis | uiuis et urtica, sic uiues protinus, ut te | confestim liquidus Fortunae riuus inauret*)—that is, to enrich him with gold.²⁷ Using his *fructus* properly implies distinguishing between necessary, vegetable *fructus* and unnecessary, mineral *fructus*, and going on eating his greens. The coda of the *Epistle* is not always read in the light of this discussion. The *fruges* which golden Copia pours into Italy from her full horn may be as ambiguous as the *fructus* of the earlier part of the poem

²⁶ Cf. O. A. W. Dilke (*Horace: Epistles, Book I*, London, 1954), ad loc.: ‘*Fructibus*: not only “produce” but “revenues”, all that comes in money or kind out of the estates.’ See also E. C. Wickham (*Horace, the Odes, Carmen Saeculare and Epodes*, Oxford, 1891), ad loc.: ‘There is probably a play on “*fructibus* ... *frueris*.”’

²⁷ I disagree with Dilke (op. cit.) ad loc., for whom ‘there is probably no reference here, as most commentators think, to the river Pactolus, turned to gold by Midas’. Readers might well think of the Midas story here, as well as of the various sources of alluvial gold which were famous in antiquity. J. Préaux (*Q. Horatius Flaccus, Epistulae, Liber Primus*, Paris, 1968), ad loc., sees different allusions: ‘*inauret*: subtile allusion à l’abaissement de Phraate, cité ailleurs pour ses richesses royales, et à l’âge d’or qui approche...’.

—either the agricultural fruits, whether of Italy itself or of its empire, or, metaphorically, the luxurious spoils of the imperial successes Horace lists,²⁸ the mineral, monetary nature of which is reflected in the goldenness of the Plenty who pours them. In the light of the *Epistle* and of the wider Horatian discourse on luxury and gold, the goldenness of Copia may be taken to imply moral danger.

We might note here that the *Epistle* is far from alone among the works of Horace in making gold the villain of its piece. The very Horatian theme of living the simple life repeatedly contrasts itself with the excess characterized by the use of gold. The 'golden mean'—the *aurea mediocritas* which Horace advocates in *Odes* 2. 10 is a double oxymoron: mediocrity is quite the opposite not only of the excellence but of the excess characterized by gold.²⁹ Elsewhere in the *Odes*, Horace defines the *mediocritas* of his own life precisely in terms of abstention from gold: at *Odes* 1. 31, he prays for neither gold nor Indian ivory, and boasts at *Odes* 2.18 that his ceilings shine with neither ivory nor gold. In book 3, the undesirability of gold is stressed not only as a personal but as a political issue. In *Odes* 3. 3, Juno advises the Romans that gold is better left underground, and Horace, in *Odes* 3. 24, tells them to mark their repentance either by dedicating their gold on the Capitol or by throwing it into the sea: 'gems and useless gold' have become the *summi materies mali*—the 'stuff of our greatest ill' (3. 24. 49). The repeated vilification of gold in the Horatian discourse, on top of the discourse within the *Epistle* itself, must imply a degree of moral ambiguity on the part of golden Copia: the fruits she pours are potentially the *summi materies mali*.

Returning to the *Carmen*, we may now postulate two different ways in which the presence of blessed Copia might have been read in a passage which corresponds so closely to that in the *Epistle*. On one hand, one might read that Copia here, like Copia in the *Epistle*, is herself also, by implication, golden—in which case her blessedness comes into doubt. On the other hand, one might read Copia's goldlessness in the *Carmen*, in contrast to her goldenness in the *Epistle*, as being a guarantee of Copia's blessedness. Copia is blessed because she is goldless. Moreover, the situation of Copia in the *Carmen* can be seen as mirroring the situation of the *saeculum*. As it is left to the reader to decide whether or not Copia is golden, so, as we have seen, it is left to the reader also whether or not the *saeculum* is golden. And the *saeculum*, like Copia herself, may be the more blessed for being goldless.

For goldenness as a sign of unblestness, one need look only as far as Ovid's famous reworking of Propertius 3. 13. 49–50 at *Ars Amatoria* 2. 277–8, in which he proclaims that 'now truly are the generations golden: by gold comes the highest honour; by gold is love appeased' (*aurea sunt uere nunc saecula: plurimus auro | uenit honos, auro conciliatur amor*). Ovid's conceit is not the one-off joke which it is

²⁸ Not, as Wickham (op. cit.) and E. P. Morris (Horace: *Satires and Epistles*, 1939, repr. Oklahoma, 1968), ad loc., would have it, merely a successful harvest. See also Préaux (op. cit.), ad l. 1: 'fructibus: par cette mise en relief, soulignée par *frueris* et *copia* au v.2, H. prépare la conclusion de son épître *aurea fruges ... Copia cornu*.' However, Préaux follows Wickham in his failure to associate the negative aspects of goldenness at the beginning of the *Epistle* with the goldenness of Copia at the end. Both draw an association between *aurea Copia* and the golden race, but neither interprets the association as deleterious to the golden race.

²⁹ Noted, for example, by D. West, 'Horace's Poetic Technique in the *Odes*', in C. D. N. Costa (ed.), *Horace* (London, 1973), 49: 'This dazzling oxymoron has been too successful. We are too familiar with it to realize how provocative it is, and how it fits the argument. Mediocrity is drab. In calling it golden, Horace is differentiating it from the squalor of poverty (*obsoleti sordibus tecti*), and also from the rich man's palace (*invidenda aula*). It is the mean that is truly golden, not the golden gewgaws of the wealthy.'

sometimes read as being, but an example of a wider topos of play on the positive and negative associations of gold and goldenness. The Greek epigrammatist, Antipater of Thessalonica echoes (or is echoed by) Ovid at *A.P.* 5. 31:

χρύσεος ἦν γενεὴ καὶ χάλκεος ἀργυρὴ τε
 πρόσθεν, παντοίῃ δ' ἡ Κυθήρεια τὰ νῦν,
 καὶ χρυσοῦν τίει, καὶ χάλκεον ἄνδρ' ἐφίλησεν,
 καὶ τοὺς ἀργυρέους οὐποτ' ἀποστρέφεται.
 Νέστωρ ἢ Παφίῃ· δοκέω δ' ὅτι καὶ Δανάη Ζεὺς
 οὐ χρυσός, χρυσοῦς δ' ἦλθε φέρων ἑκατόν.

There was a Golden Race and a Brazen and, before that, a Silver; but now Cytherean Aphrodite belongs to all three, and honours the golden man, has loved the brazen man, and never turns her back on the silver. Paphian Aphrodite is a Nestor. It seems to me that Zeus did not come to Danaë as gold, but bearing a hundred gold pieces.

Here, the golden, silver and brazen races become either, as Paton suggests in the Loeb edition, the rich man, the soldier and the banker, or simply lovers of different degrees of wealth. At *A.P.* 5.30, Antipater associates the efficacy of lovers' gifts with the goldenness traditionally ascribed to Aphrodite; his interpretation of the Danaë-myth, making Zeus's golden shower the gift of an excluded lover, is shared not only by his Greek colleague, Parmenion, at *A.P.* 5. 34, but by Ovid in *Amores* 3. 8. The paradox, most notably expressed by Ovid in *Amores* 3. 8 and *Metamorphoses* 1. 89–150, that the golden age knew no gold, is part of the same play,³⁰ as is the double oxymoron in Horace's 'golden mean' and, earlier, Cicero's joke on the appropriateness to a rich man of the name Chrysogonus at *Pro Roscio* 124. Taking our lead from such equations of goldenness—including the goldenness of the *saecula*—with the goldenness of money, we are justified in asking whether a similar moral issue might have been at stake in the goldenness of the *saeculum* as we have seen to have been at stake in the goldenness or goldlessness of Copia: whether the *saeculum*, like Copia, might have been not only as good, but also as bad, as gold.

If we turn back to the fourth *Eclogue*, we find that no strict distinction can in fact be drawn between the metaphorical and the physical goldenness of the *aurea gens* which Vergil describes. The environment enjoyed by the *gens* is notable not only for the fantasticality but also for the materiality of its plenty: nature exceeds itself by the spontaneous generation both of crops—*fruges*—and of the material of luxury. Perfumes and dyes abound such as would normally cost their buyers dear. Far from being the necessary crops by which humans exist, such luxuries fall rather among the excessive *fruges* which Horace describes in the *Epistle* as being poured into Italy from the full horn of golden Plenty. Dyes and perfumes, in Horace and in the wider discourse of luxury, fall with gold and gems among the 'stuff of our deepest ill'. As the goldenness of Ovid's *aurea saecula* reflects money, so the goldenness of Vergil's *aurea gens* reflects luxury.

The *Carmen Saeculare*, as we have seen, 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. Later, where the *Eclogue* links the return of the Greek *Δίκη* with the return of *Saturnia regna* and the mystical plenty of the golden race, the *Carmen*, by contrast, links the return of a host of very Roman virtues—*Fides*, *Pax*, *Honos*, *Pudor* and *Virtus*—with a Plenty which is neither mystical nor golden. And the goldlessness of Plenty is in perfect accord with virtues typically seen as being undermined by gold and

³⁰ Pace Baldry 87.

by luxury. The goldlessness of Plenty in the *Carmen* stands as a symbol of the goldlessness and therefore the goodness of the *saeculum*. The return of the golden race is not proclaimed because a golden race is morally dubious by virtue of its very goldenness.

All too often, the poetry of Vergil is read as in some way embodying the characteristic ideology of the Augustan Age; but to read Vergil in this way involves ignoring not only the complexities within the Vergilian discourse itself, but also the fact that a good three quarters of the Augustan Age took place *following* the death of Vergil. Since the *Ludi Saeculares* took place two years after Vergil's death, and the *Carmen Saeculare* was commissioned not from Vergil but from Horace, we should beware of reading the *Carmen* as though it were a part of the Vergilian corpus. As we have seen, the *Carmen* alludes to, and toys with, expectations about the *saeculum* which Vergil had raised in the fourth *Eclogue* and in the *Aeneid*, but can be read as doing so only in order to reject them at the very moment when they seem closest to fulfilment. Within the discourse of the golden race, the *Carmen Saeculare* looks as much forward to Ovid as it does back to Vergil.

Like the *Ars Amatoria*, the *Carmen* draws attention to the moral ambiguity of the golden race and, in particular, to the ambiguity reflected in the very *goldenness* of the Race. It is easy to forget the central place taken by gold in the Roman luxury-debate and so to overestimate the extent to which the idea of a golden race had become a cliché in the Augustan Age. It is probable that the idea of a physically golden race—one which, perhaps, enjoyed the expensive dyes and perfumes of the fourth *Eclogue*—appealed to some of Augustus' contemporaries in the same way that it appealed to the avaricious contemporaries described by the Younger Seneca at *Epistles* 115. 11–13: on the other hand, gold had always been associated with decadence, crime and the un-Roman luxury of the Hellenistic World—just as the myth of the golden race was itself of Greek origin. Insofar as it interrelated with a complex and variegated discourse on luxury, the discourse of the golden race itself became complex and variegated; and on complexity and variegation ensued moral ambiguity. Nor, as we have seen, was the discourse of luxury the only other discourse on which the discourse of the golden race impinged. In the light of such a nexus of conflicting discourses and moral uncertainties, we should be prepared to acknowledge that a golden race was not a simple concept or a simple good; and, therefore, that more might be involved in such a poem as the *Carmen Saeculare* than a simple proclamation of its return.*

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* Since this article was written—and, in the latter case, since its going to press—two new discussions of the golden age have appeared, in David Castriota's *The Ara Pacis Augustae and the Imagery of Abundance in Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial Art* (Princeton, 1995), 124–44, and in Karl Galinsky's *Augustan Culture* (Princeton, 1996), 90–121. Of the two authors, Galinsky treats material closer to my own, and I concur with much of his argument—on the error of seeing the fourth *Eclogue* as a 'seminal text of the Augustan era proper' (91), on the importance of gold (treated briefly, 97–9), and on the *Carmen*'s 'stop[ping] short of proclaiming a Golden Age, and especially a Golden Age of automatic bliss or felicity' (102). On the other hand, Galinsky fails to treat the *Carmen*'s complex engagements with other golden-age texts and is unwilling to admit of alternative readings of the hymn. Like Castriota's book, his is a thoughtful addition to the literature, but raises questions, not least about the extent to which poetry reflected or governed current moods at Rome, and to what extent those moods were themselves uniform or, in Galinsky's terminology, enjoyed a uniform 'evolution'.