

That's So "Golden Age": Metaphorical Reigns of Saturn Created in Catullus 64 and the
Embassy to Diomedes in *Aeneid* 11.225 – 295

Although the Augustan era is the period of Roman history most known for its references to the *mythological* Golden Age or Reign of Saturn, it is also true that "Augustus was able to latch onto something that was already in the air before he came along" (Zanker 1988). Roman poets, however, were not mere passive recipients of this Golden Age myth but also active participants in shaping this discourse. This paper argues that, in Catullus 64, it is the realized *fides* of the faithful lovers, however long it may last, that is "Golden Age," and, in the embassy to Diomedes in *Aeneid* 11.225 – 295, it is the submission to a ruler renowned for his *pietas* that is Golden Age.

Several scholars have examined Roman uses of the Golden Age myth by looking closely at possible sources or by attempting to reconcile the several conflicting ideas and definitions of the Golden Age that the Romans had inherited, an inconsistent tradition where the Reign of Saturn was an era without "property [or] its corollaries, social conflict and war" but also somehow a "world of bestiality characterized by anthropophagy" (Vidal-Naquet 1986). This paper focuses, however, more on the metaphorical Golden Ages these poems create rather than trying to isolate which idea of some literal Golden Age they might be agreeing with. They are redefining uncertain and unfixed myths rather than just using or referring to old ones. By creating metaphorical Golden Ages, these poets redefine what it means to live in an earthly paradise. They decide what is "Golden Age" and what is not.

Although Catullus 64 certainly "juxtaposes incompatible mythological variants" (O'Hara 2007) and can be read as "really a divorce poem" rather than a marriage poem (Feeney 2007), its chronological paradox also creates a time outside of time for the wedding of Peleus and Thetis.

While several scholars have noted the Golden Age myth evoked by Diomedes in the Aeneid, this paper focuses on how Virgil has created a new metaphorical Golden Age with this passage and will conclude by looking at how Virgil may have been engaging with Plato's discussion of the reign of Kronos in his *Politicus* where “men are incapable of governing themselves properly without superhuman guidance” (Dillon 1992).

Works Cited

- Dillon, John. “Plato and the Golden Age.” *Hermathena*. No. 153 (Winter 1992), 31.
- Feeney, Denis. *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 123.
- O'Hara, James J. *Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus, Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41.
- Vidal-Naquet, Pierre. *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*. Trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 286 – 287.
- Zanker, Paul. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Trans. Alan Shapiro. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 167.