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Classical Sources of the Golden Age Motif From Dryden to Cowper

Catherine M. Colosky

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CLASSICAL SOURCES
OF THE GOLDEN AGE MOTIF
FROM DRYDEN TO COWPER

A Thesis
Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota

by
Catherine M. Colosky
"

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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This thesis, presented by Catherine M. Colosky as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of North Dakota, is hereby approved by the committee under which she has carried on her work.

J. G. St. Clair
Chairman

Robert A. Bradwell

A. M. Rovelstad

A. V. Overn.
Director of the Graduate Division

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

The myth of the Golden Age, a remote period in which man was innocent, peaceful, and free from toil, has been the theme of authors for over two thousand years. In Western literature this idea originated with the Greeks and was adopted by the Romans, from whom it was passed eventually, and sometimes indirectly, to the English. During the Renaissance in England a resurgence of interest in the theme affected the literature of the period. Of the writers whose treatment of the Golden Age influenced later works, Spenser and Milton rank first.

In recent years scholars have brought the study of the Golden Age myth up to the eighteenth century. In an elaborate and well-documented volume, Arthur O. Lovejoy has defined and presented the different kinds of primitivism in antiquity.¹ F. Y. St. Clair has investigated the influence of the myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance period.² Frederick C. Osenburg has discussed the ideas of the Golden Age and the

¹Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity (Baltimore, 1935).

²F. Y. St. Clair, The Myth of the Golden Age from Spenser to Milton (Unpublished Doctor's Dissertation; Harvard University, 1931).

decay of Nature in the English Renaissance.³ The history of the idea of the Golden Age has been treated briefly by Henry A. Burd.⁴

Since the authors of the eighteenth century refer to the Golden Age and use details from the myth in their writings, the task remains of ascertaining the Greek and Latin influences upon the individual authors of this period. The purpose of this thesis is to determine the particular sources in classical literature and in frequently quoted translations to which eighteenth century Golden Age passages in English literature can be traced. The discussion will, incidentally, include earlier English influences and the social and literary trends in the treatment of the legend.

For the characteristic details of the Golden Age, it is necessary to turn to the ancient writers, especially to those who were most influential in the eighteenth century. To Hesiod is given credit for the first poetic presentation of the Five Ages, or, as he designated them, the Five Races: Golden, Silver, Bronze, Heroic, and Iron.⁵ The Golden Race,

³Frederick C. Osenburg, The Ideas of the Golden Age and the Decay of the World in the English Renaissance (Unpublished Doctor's Dissertation; University of Illinois, 1939).

⁴Henry A. Burd, "The Golden Age in Eighteenth Century Poetry," The Sewanee Review, pp. 172-185.

⁵Hesiod, Works and Days, tr. by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London, 1914), pp. 10-17.

which lived when Cronus (Saturn) was king of heaven, was a carefree, peaceful, perpetually young family of mortal men, who lived without toil upon the abundant fruits of the earth. When this race was destroyed, a Silver Race was created, much worse than the former, both physically and mentally, as their long infancy and short maturity demonstrated. Moreover, because, impious and quarrelsome, they failed to give proper veneration to the gods, they too were put away. The third race of men, brazen, terrible and strong, was not descended from the former. Their delight in violence and warfare brought about their destruction. Next, Zeus created a race of heroes or demi-gods, who sailed the seas and engaged in wars with Thebes and Troy. Thus their lives ended in battle, but they were granted to go after death to the fruitful Islands of the Blest, where they are ruled by Cronus.⁶ Finally, the fifth or Iron Race, in which Hesiod pictured himself as living, was created by Zeus. This race, which will continue until man is born senile, is sinful, unfilial, and irreverent towards age. Ceaseless toil, pain, and grief are its lot. During this period Aidos (Shame) and Nemesis (Indignation) will abandon mankind; only sorrow will remain.

⁶ Because later writers desired to present a continuous human deterioration, they usually slight or omit this period, which would obviously be an interlude in the decline.

This period is the worst and apparently continually deteriorating; but it may be followed by a better time, for Hesiod wishes that he had been born before or after. This treatment of a belief in a primitive ideal life is important, because it is the first.

Differing from other classical versions of the legend, Eclogue IV of Virgil placed the Golden Age in the future.⁷ His poem foretold the return of Saturn and of the maid, now represented as Justice. Virgil prophesied that the untilled earth would bring forth an abundance of food, that goats would come home to be milked, that snakes and poisonous plants would disappear. He also referred to the honey which was to drip from the oak, to the animals at peace with each other, to the variously colored wool which would be produced on the sheep, and finally to the cessation of commerce. All of these happenings were to accompany or follow the birth of a marvelous boy who would reign in this Golden Age to come. In this prophecy of the return of the ideal early period, Virgil implied a belief in the theory of world cycles which usually means a continuous repetition of the same states of the world as a whole in exactly the same order.⁸ If the first period is to return, apparently a new cycle is to begin.

⁷Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 5-45.

⁸Lovejoy, Primitivism, pp. 72-3.

Virgil, in Georgic I, recalled a time when unmarked plains produced without cultivation an ample supply of food, which was shared by all.⁹ Then with the advent of Jove, the snake became poisonous, the wolf began to prey on other animals, and the sea was tossed by storms. In Jupiter's reign the trees no longer produced honey, the secret of fire was lost, and the brooks ceased to flow with wine. Then men learned agriculture, sailed the seas and named the stars. Then, too, they began to fish, to hunt game for food, and to use the shrill saw. Necessity compelled the development of many arts, and man was forced to labor unceasingly.

In a different vein, Tibullus deplored the fact that the Iron Age strives for booty rather than love.¹⁰ He described the innocent and open pleasures of love in the Golden Age. He ended with a plea for the old life.

Ovid, in his story of the four ages in the Metamorphoses, added many particulars.¹¹ To contrast the Golden Age with the Iron Age, he dwelt upon these periods in greater detail than he did upon the Silver and Bronze. According to Ovid, in the first age man was so good that laws, courts, and

⁹Virgil, Georgics, I, 125-149.

¹⁰Tibullus, II, 29-38, 61-74.

¹¹Ovid, Metamorphoses, I, 89-150.

judges were unnecessary. Travel, commerce, and warfare were unknown. Men lived in an everlasting Spring upon the simple vegetarian fare that nature amply provided. In the Silver Age, when the other seasons were added to the year, men had to seek the shelter of houses. After the savage, more bellicose, but not yet impious, Brazen Age, came the Iron Age, characterized by trickery, violence, greed, navigation, trade, mining and metallurgy. Private ownership impiety, and injustice appeared. The maiden Astraea (Justice) left the earth. In his account, Ovid, like many other Latin writers, emphasized the Golden Age in order to honor Saturn.¹²

The Golden Age concept, which has been presented above, is related to primitivism, or the doctrine that primitive peoples, whether the earliest men or present-day savages, are both superior to and happier than the civilized. Primitive life may be "easier" than contemporary life because it is simpler, because it is free from modern restrictions, rules and conventions. This is a soft primitivism.¹³ On the other hand it may be characterized by a greater degree of physical

¹² The Romans, who identified Saturn with Cronus, especially venerated him because of the legend that, when deposed by Jove, Saturn had come to Italy, where he ruled in the Golden Age of their country. Thus he was the founder of their nation as well as a culture-god who taught early man the arts of agriculture and navigation.

¹³ Lovejoy, Primitivism, p. 9.

hardship. Primitive man, however,

wanted less and therefore knew how to be content with little; he was inured to hardship, and therefore bore it courageously and cheerfully.¹⁴

This condition of man without the comforts and advantages of the present, but morally surpassing modern man characterizes hard primitivism. Such a state is not a Golden Age, for in that period men enjoyed greater ease and comfort than they do now. The men of the Golden Age were soft primitives.

While the versions of the Golden Age myth which have been summarized above conform to the idea of a soft primitivism, Juvenal in satirizing an age of luxury stressed the roughness of early man.¹⁵ These unkempt creatures, however, lived simply, honestly, and innocently. Theft and adultery were unknown to them. The two goddesses, Astraea and Chastity, who lived in their midst recall the two goddesses in Hesiod's account. The people were simple and chaste compared with Juvenal's generation. Thus, some of the Golden Age details appear in the satire. On the other hand, the men were coarse, ugly, and almost bestial, living in chilly caves which housed

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵ Juvenal, Satires, VI, 1-24.

their flocks. Their food consisted of acorns, apples, and cabbages, instead of the rich outpourings of nature in the earlier versions. Since this passage contains hard primitivistic details, it is not a true picture of the Golden Age.

Although hard primitivism characterized Juvenal's Golden Age, the earlier passage of Lucretius depicted a more rigorous life.¹⁶ De Rerum Natura includes an account of creation in which it is stated that infant mortals originally burst from wombs growing in the earth, and were nourished by the pores of the earth in their infancy. However, when they reached manhood, they battled the elements, hunted the wild beasts which they feared, and lived upon the meager food which the earth furnished. Gradually they acquired knowledge and skills, which, although they brought war, were signs of progress. Thus, while in some details, the primitive life which Lucretius described resembles the Golden Age, his ancient man advanced rather than retrogressed as man of the ideal early period did.

Such are the major forces that shaped the treatment of the Golden Age myth in the eighteenth century.

¹⁶Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, V, 821-1457.

CHAPTER II

FROM DRYDEN TO POPE

From the time of the Restoration through the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the myth of the Golden Age was kept alive by means of translation and satire. Of the translators in this period, Dryden was the first and most important, since his works influenced William Walsh's satire and Pope's Messiah. Dryden not only translated the legend, but also used the theme in his Astraea Redux and in The State of Innocence. Satirists, in addition to Walsh, who ridiculed their time by contrasting it with an ideal early era, were Nicholas Rowe in "An Epistle to Flavia" and Sir Richard Blackmore in "A Satyr on Wit." The latter, however, is directed against the hard primitivistic ideas of Lucretius rather than based on the true Golden Age picture. As Dryden opened the period with an apparently genuine interest in the myth, Pope ended it with his imitation of Virgil in The Messiah and a significant reference to the theme in his "Discourse on Pastoral Poetry."

Most important of the classical authors from 1660 to 1725 was Virgil, whose Eclogue IV was translated by Dryden, parodied by William Walsh, and imitated by Pope. Other Latin poets whose Golden Age passages influenced English literature of this period were Lucretius and Tibullus.

Dryden's first reference to the myth of the Golden Age was in Astraea Redux in which he welcomed the return of Charles in 1660. With his assumption that times would now improve, Dryden was expressing the general feeling of relief. For the motto of the poem he chose a line from Virgil, "Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna,"¹⁷ which indicates his optimism. Although the poem itself has an undertone of dissatisfaction with the unrest and instability which had characterized the government of England for almost two decades, it ends on a jubilant and hopeful note:

And now Time's whiter series is begun,
Which is soft centuries shall smoothly run....
O happy age! O times like those alone
By fate reserv'd for great Augustus' throne!¹⁸

Dryden alluded to Virgil and the Golden Age not only in the title and the motto, but also in the lines above, which recall the prophecy of Eclogue IV, "magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo."¹⁹

Almanzor in Dryden's The Conquest of Granada, first produced in 1670, recalled the absence of laws in primitive times:

¹⁷Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 6.

¹⁸John Dryden, "Astraea Redux," The Poetical Works of John Dryden, ed. by G. R. Noyes (Boston, 1909), p. 7.

¹⁹Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 6.

I am as free as nature first made man,
 Ere the base laws of servitude began,
 When wild in woods the noble savage ran.²⁰

Ovid had made freedom from legal restrictions one of the qualities of the Golden Age:

poena metusque aberant, nec verba minantia fixo
 aere legebantur.²¹

In The State of Innocence (1677) Dryden had abbreviated Paradise Lost to confine it and much additional conversation within the limits of a five-act rimed opera.²²

Without our care behold th' unlabored ground
 Bounteous of fruit; above our shady bowers
 The creeping jessamine thrusts her fragrant flowers;
 The myrtle orange, and the blushing rose,
 With bending heaps so nigh their blooms disclose,
 Each seems to swell the flavour which the other
 blows:
 By these the peach, the guava, and the pine,
 And creeping 'twixt them all, the mantling vine
 Does round their trunks her purple clusters twine.²³

This speech is evidently an ornate compression of the description of the Garden of Eden in Paradise Lost.²⁴ In

²⁰ Works of John Dryden, ed. by Sir Walter Scott and George Saintsbury (Edinburgh, 1883), IV, 43.

²¹ Metamorphoses, I, 91-2.

²² Works of John Dryden, V, 93-178.

²³ Works of John Dryden, V, 143-4.

²⁴ Paradise Lost, IV, 208-268.

it God had placed "all trees of noblest kind for sight,
smell, taste," and²⁵

Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and
balm;
Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind,
Hung amiable.²⁶

In the Garden of Eden were lawns and downs where the flocks
grazed,

or the flowery lap
Of some irriguous valley spread her store.
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose.
Another side umbrageous grots and caves
Of cool recess, o'er which the mantling vine
Lays forth her purple grape, and gently creeps
Luxuriant.²⁷

This passage with the "mantling vine" is closest to
Dryden's opera.

Dryden might have been influenced by Virgil's Eclogue IV:

At tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cultu
errantis hederas passim cum baccare tellus²⁸
mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho,

or by "incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva."²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., 217.

²⁶ Ibid., 248-250.

²⁷ Ibid., 254-260.

²⁸ Virgil, Eclogue IV, 18-20.

²⁹ Ibid., 29.

Not until 1697 were Dryden's translations of Virgil completed and published; but throughout his career, and particularly after 1688, when he lost his government income, he turned Latin poetry into comparatively good English versions.³⁰ Among those poems were Virgil's Eclogue IV and Georgic I, all of Book I and the first half of Book XV of Ovid's Metamorphoses, and Juvenal's Satire VI, all of which contain Golden Age passages. However, since he translated all of Virgil's Eclogues and Georgics, there is little significance in his rendering Eclogue IV and Georgic I. Of Juvenal's sixteen satires Dryden translated only five, including Satire VI, which has the Golden Age passage. Of the fifteen books of the Metamorphoses he translated all of two books and parts of five others. Among the portions which he selected were Book I and the speech of Pythagoras in Book XV. In these are the two Golden Age passages in the Metamorphoses. While Dryden's choice of poems containing Golden Age material may have been accidental, it is interesting that he reproduced the fullest and most popular accounts of the Latin poets.

If, as Nicholas Rowe implies in his title,³¹ and as

³⁰J. McG. Bottkol defends Dryden's scholarship on the grounds that apparent carelessness and ignorance can be traced to faulty Latin texts. His article is "Dryden's Latin Scholarship," Modern Philology, XL (1923), 241-254.

³¹Nicholas Rowe, "An Epistle to Flavia, On Sight of Two Pindar Odes on the Spleen and Vanity. Written by a Lady Her Friend," The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper, ed. by Alexander Chalmers (London, 1810), IX, 468.

Myra Reynolds concludes, "An Epistle to Flavia" was occasioned by his seeing a manuscript copy of Lady Winchelsea's "The Spleen," published in 1701, his poem is next in order chronologically.³² This poem combined the Golden Age idea with that of the noble savage in a manner which was to become more common later in the century. Rowe compared the troubles of writing poetry under the existing conventions with those which the complexity of civilization brought to the primitive:

Sure in the better ages of old time,
Nor poetry nor love was thought a crime;
From Heaven they both, the gods best gifts,
 were sent,
Divinely perfect both, and innocent.
Then were bad poets and loose loves unknown;
None felt a warmth which they might blush
 to own.
Beneath cool shades our happy fathers lay,
And spent in pure untainted joys the day:
Artless their loves, artless their numbers were,
While nature simply did in both appear,
None could the censor or the critic fear.
Pleas'd to be pleas'd, they took what Heaven
 bestow'd,
Nor were too curious of the given good.
At length like Indians fond of fancy'd toys,
We lost being happy, to be thought mere wise.
In one curs'd age, to punish verse and sin,
Critics and hangmen, both at once came in.
Wit and the laws had both the same ill fate,
And partial tyrants sway'd in either state.³³

³²A friend submitted Lady Winchelsea's poems to Rowe, who wrote his "Epistle" before the publication of any of Lady Winchelsea's poems, according to Myra Reynolds in The Poems of Anne Countess of Winchelsea (Chicago, 1903), p. liii.

³³Rowe, "An Epistle to Flavia," p. 468.

While the poem is satirical in its use of the Golden Age myth, the similarity of "our happy fathers"³⁴ with "felices"³⁵ and "none felt a warmth which they might blush to own"³⁶ with Tibullus's

Felices olim, Veneri cum fertur aperte
servire aeternos non puduisse deos.³⁷

Likewise, Rowe's

Beneath cool shades our happy fathers lay³⁸
And spent in pure untainted joys the day.

is probably derived from

tunc, quibus aspirabat Amor, praebebat aperte
mitis in umbrosa gaudia valle Venus.³⁹

Rowe was a student of the classics and was probably familiar with Tibullus; but, since he also knew Italian literature and had an interest in the drama, his source might have been Tasso's Aminta, or one of its English translations.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Tibullus, II, iii, 29.

³⁶ Rowe, "An Epistle to Flavia," p. 468.

³⁷ Tibullus, II, iii, 29-30.

³⁸ "Epistle to Flavia," p. 468.

³⁹ Tibullus, II, iii, 71-74.

⁴⁰ According to DNB, Rowe was well acquainted with the classics, particularly the drama, and with French, Spanish, and Italian literature.

Artless loves in beautiful natural surroundings are expressed in Tasso's

Allhor tra fiori, e linfe
Trahean dolci carole
Gli Amoretti senz' archi, e senza faci,
Sedean Pastori, e Ninfe.⁴¹

Samuel Daniel had translated these lines literally, but quite felicitously:

Then among 'st flowers and springs,
Making delightful sport,
Sat lovers without conflict, without flame;
And nymphs and shepherds sings.⁴²

The Aminta also decries the restrictions or laws which Honor had placed upon man

Non mischiaua il suo affanno
Frà le liete dolcezze
De l'amorosa gregge,
Ne fù sua dura legge
Nota a quell'alme in libertate auucezze,
Ma legge aurea, e felice
Che natura scolpi: S'ei piace, ei lice.⁴³

Daniel expressed the thought of these lines thus:

⁴¹ Torquato Tasso, Aminta, I, ii (Chorus), quoted by St. Clair, Golden Age, pp. 274-5.

⁴² Samuel Daniel, "A Pastoral," Chalmers, III, 549.

⁴³ Tasso, Aminta, quoted by St. Clair, p. 274.

Nor yet [Honour] sad griefs imparts,⁴⁴
 Amidst the sweet delights
 Of joyful, am'rous wights.
 Nor were his hard laws known to free-born hearts;
 But golden laws, like these
 Which Nature wrote -- That's lawful,
which does please.

Both passages emphasize freedom from restraint, and Rowe's expression "pleas'd to be pleas'd"⁴⁵ could stem from the last line of the above stanzas, "that's lawful, which does please"⁴⁶ or "s'ei piace, ei lice."⁴⁷ However, the closer parallels of phrasing in Rowe and Tibullus make the latter's elegy the more probable source.

Like Rowe, William Walsh in "The Golden Age Restored, 1703," used the theme for satire.⁴⁸ A Whig and a supporter of the Protestant succession, he attacked the government of Queen Anne in his imitation of Virgil:

Sicilian Muse, begin a loftier flight;
 Not all in trees and lowly shrubs delight:
 Or in your rural shades you still pursue,

⁴⁴ Daniel, "A Pastoral," p. 548.

⁴⁵ Rowe, "An Epistle to Flavia," p. 468.

⁴⁶ Daniel, p. 548.

⁴⁷ Tasso, p. 274.

⁴⁸ William Walsh, "The Golden Age Restored, 1703. An Imitation of the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil: Supposed to Have Been Taken from the Sybelline Prophecy," Chalmers, English Poets, VIII, 418.

Make your shades fit for able statesmens'
view.

The time is come by ancient bards foretold,
Restoring the Saturnian age of gold;
The vile, degenerate, whiggish offspring ends,
A high-church progeny from Heaven descends.⁴⁹

Walsh continues with a series of attacks on Harley and many other political and religious leaders. That the poem is really a parody on Dryden's "The Fourth Pastoral" one can best see by comparing the last two lines above with the corresponding couplet in Dryden's translation:

The base, degenerate iron offspring ends;
A golden progeny from heav'n descends.⁵⁰

The fact that the poem is a parody does not lessen its significance, but rather argues the popularity of Dryden's translation and of the Golden Age theme; for the unfamiliar is not the subject of burlesque.

Although "A Satyr Against Wit" was published in 1700,⁵¹ it is considered here with Sir Richard Blackmore's later philosophical poem, Creation, which appeared in 1712. In the former he mourns the departure of those

⁴⁹ Ibid., ll. 1-8.

⁵⁰ Dryden, "The Fourth Pastoral," Poetical Works, p. 428.

⁵¹ Sir Richard Blackmore, "A Satyr Against Wit, 1700" quoted by Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1939), I, 214.

old unpolished Times
 As free from Wit as other modern Crimes!
 As our Forefathers Vig'rous were and Brave,
 So were they Virtuous, -Wise, Discreet, and Grave,
 Destesting both alike the Wit and Knave.⁵²

Blackmore has chosen an ironical vein much like Rowe's in

Sure in better Ages of Old Time
 Nor Poetry nor Love was thought a Crime;⁵³

and in the cynical conclusion, "We lost being happy to be thought more wise."⁵⁴ Both writers chose contemporary learning as one object of their irony. The passages are sufficiently close to raise the question as to whether one inspired the other; but the spirit of irony was abroad and had been throughout the last quarter of the seventeenth century, especially after the "Popish Plot" of 1678, which increased religious and political controversy. It is not surprising that references to the perfection of ancient times entered into the altercations and into the literature.

That Blackmore did not treat the Golden Age belief seriously is more evident in Creation, published in 1712, in which he attempted to refute the Lucretian teaching that

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rowe, "An Epistle of Flavia," ll. 13-14.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 1. 28.

the world originated from a fortuitous concourse of atoms.⁵⁵
 In the passage, answering the theory of Lucretius as to the
 creation of man, Blackmore uses the doctrine of Lucretius
 as proof of the negative argument:

Grant, Epicurus, that by casual Birth
 Men sprung Spontaneous from the fruitful
 Earth.

When on the Glebe the naked Infants lay,
 How were the creatures fed? You say,
 The teaming Soil did from its Breasts exclude
 A soft and milky Liquor for their Food.
 I will not ask what this apt Humour made,
 Nor by what wondrous Channel 'twas conveyed.
 For if we such Enquiries make, we know
 Your short Reply. It happened to be so.⁵⁶

The Golden Age details used here are not accepted by Blackmore,
 but are cited only for the sake of argument. Moreover, they
 do not reflect a true Golden Age since the only characteristic
 presented is the nourishment of the creatures by nature
 during their infancy.

Blackmore also pictured an early period when :

Studious of Good, Man disregarded Fame,
 And Useful Knowledge was his eldest Aim;
 Thro' Metaphysic Wilds he never flew.
 Nor the dark Haunts of School Chimaeras
 knew
 But had alone his Happiness in View.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Sir Richard Blackmore, Creation: A Philosophical
 Poem in Seven Books (London, 1712).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

Since Blackmore in the succeeding lines tells of man's early agricultural tasks and his progress in learning crafts and skills, what he describes was not a genuine Golden Age even though man was happy and good.

Closer to the classical model in feeling than any of the eighteenth-century writers already considered, with the exception of Dryden, is Pope in "The Messiah." This poem first appeared anonymously in The Spectator in 1712, with a brief note by Richard Steele introducing the Eclogue, as "written by a great Genius, a Friend of mine." Pope's title stated that "The Messiah" was "A sacred Eclogue, compos'd of several Passages of Isaiah the Prophet. Written in Imitation of Virgil's Pollio."⁵⁸ The motto of this number of The Spectator is "Aggredere, O magnos, aderit jam tempus, honores" from Eclogue IV,⁵⁹ Pope combined the similar prophecies, of the birth of Jesus Christ and of a boy, probably the son of Pollio. When the poem was reprinted in the collected works of Pope in 1717, it was accompanied by the corresponding quotations from Virgil, as well as the biblical references, which had appeared in The Spectator. Thus, Pope acknowledged his indebtedness to Virgil. Since the Virgilian elements pervade the poem and are interwoven into the Messianic

⁵⁸Alexander Pope, "Messiah: A Sacred Eclogue," The Spectator (378), May 14, 1712.

⁵⁹Virgil, Eclogues IV, 43.

prophecy, brief quotations will exemplify his use of the Golden Age legend. The following excerpt illustrates the way in which Isaiah and Virgil are combined and, as Pope thought, improved:

The lambs with wolves shall graze the verdant
mead,
And boys in flow'ry bands the tigers lead;
The steer and lion at one crib shall meet,
And harmless serpents lick the pilgrim's feet.⁶⁰

In this extract can be seen the lines from the Bible which Pope avowed:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and
the leopard lie down with the kid, and the
calf and the young lion and the fatling
together...⁶¹

Virgil's fourth eclogue is there also:

nec magnos metuent armenta leones.⁶²

When the "Messiah" was reprinted in 1717, it was included with the Pastorals, which had first been published in 1709. They were prefaced by a "Discourse on Pastoral Poetry," in which Pope says:

⁶⁰Alexander Pope, "Messiah," 77-80, The Complete Poetical Works of Alexander Pope, ed. by Henry W. Boynton (Boston, 1903) p. 87.

⁶¹Isaiah, XI, 6,7, as quoted by Pope, Poetical Works, p.87.

⁶²Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 22.

If we should copy nature, it may be well to take this idea along with us, that Pastoral is an image of what they call the golden age: so that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been, when the best of men followed the employment.⁶³

In his Pastorals Pope included no genuine Golden Age details, and in Windsor Forest (1713) he dismissed his muse before she ventured into this ideal period:

Here cease thy flight, nor with unhallow'd
lays
Touch the fair frame of Albion's golden
days.⁶⁴

While Pope is neither a satirist nor a translator, his imitation is allied to translation. His more serious allusions to the myth serve as a transition to James Thomson's treatment of the legend.

⁶³Pope, Poetical Works, p. 19.

⁶⁴Ibid. p. 34, ll. 423-4.

CHAPTER III

JAMES THOMSON

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the popularity of the poetry of James Thomson, "the English Virgil," evidenced an increased interest in the Golden Age.⁶⁵ Thomson gained his title not only because, in writing his Seasons, he adopted the plan of Virgil, but also because he used the descriptive verse of the Georgics. Moreover, he also imitated many of Virgil's lines, including some on the Golden Age.

Thomson, who arrived in London from Scotland in 1725, published his Winter in March, 1726. The poem was not immediately successful; but, when influential people, especially Aaron Hill, poet and dramatist, noticed the poem, it was so much in demand that, before the end of the year, three more editions appeared.⁶⁶ The reception of Winter encouraged Thomson to publish Summer in the following year. Not until the publication of Spring (1728), however, did Golden Age details appear in Thomson's poems.

⁶⁵Dwight L. Durling calls his chapter on Thomson in Georgic Tradition in English Poetry (New York, 1935), p. 43, "The English Virgil."

⁶⁶G. C. Macaulay, James Thomson (London, 1908), pp. 15-21.

To a Scot, who had lived in the rural districts, the different seasons recalled the various farm tasks of each. Thomson, who knew Virgil's poetry, naturally turned to the Georgics; but, instead of giving precepts on husbandry, he used the work of the farmer as a part of the pageantry of the Seasons. Thomson, an admirer of Milton, chose blank verse for his poem and borrowed expressions and ideas from Paradise Lost and the minor poems. Thus,

his style imitates Virgilian dignity,
owing much to Milton, in whom he
found the closest approximation in
English of these qualities.⁶⁷

The longest of the Golden Age passages in Spring is a paraphrase of Virgil's Eclogue IV, which occurred in all the editions from that of 1728 through that of 1738, but was withdrawn in 1744.⁶⁸

This to the Poets gave the Golden Age;
When, as they sung in allegoric phrase,
The sailor-pine had not the nations yet
In commerce mixed; for every country teemed
With everything. Spontaneous harvests waved
Still in a sea of yellow plenty round.
The forest was the vineyard, where, untaught
To climb, unpruned and wild, the juicy grape
Burst into floods of wine. The knotted oak
Shook from the boughs the long, transparent streams

⁶⁷Durling, Georgic Tradition, p. 46.

⁶⁸J. Logie Robertson, The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson (London, 1908), p. 48.

Of honey, creeping through the matted grass.
 The uncultivated thorn a ruddy shower
 Of fruitage shed on such as sat below
 In blooming ease and from brown labour free,
 Save what the copious gathering grateful gave.
 The rivers foamed with nectar; or diffuse,
 Silent and soft, the milky maze devolved.
 Nor has the spongy full-expanded fleece
 Yet drunk the Tyrian dye. The stately ram
 Shone through the mead in native purple clad,
 Or milder saffron; and the dancing lamb
 The vivid crimson to the sun disclosed.
 Nothing had power to hurt; the savage soul,
 Yet untransfused into the tyger's heart,
 Burned not his bowels, nor his gamesome paw
 Drove on the fleecy partners of his play:
 While from the flowery brake the serpent rolled
 His fairer spires, and played his pointless tongue.⁶⁹

A comparison of a few passages will show how close Thomson's
 version^{is} to Eclogue IV.

The sailor-pine had not the nations yet
 In commerce mixed; for every country teemed
 With everything.⁷⁰

Except for the change in tense, these lines are almost trans-
 lations of Virgil's "nec nautica pinus / mutabit merces; omnis
 feret omnia tellus."⁷¹ Likewise,

Nor had the spongy full-expanded fleece
 Yet drunk the Tyrian dye. The stately ram
 Shone through the mead in native purple clad,

⁶⁹James Thomson, The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London, 1908) pp. 48-9.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 48

⁷¹Virgil, Eclogues, Iv, 38-9.

Or milder saffron; and the dancing lamb,
The vivid crimson to the sun disclosed,⁷²

is based upon

nec varios discet mentiri lana colores,
ipse sed in pratis aries iam suave rubenti
murice, iam croceo mutabit vellera luto;
sponte sua sandyx pascentis vestiet agnos.⁷³

That Thomson relied upon Dryden's translation can be seen
in the following passage:

The knotted oak
Shook from the boughs the long, transparent streams
Of honey, creeping through the matted grass.⁷⁴

which is, without doubt derived from the couplet in Dryden's
Fourth Pastoral:

The knotted oaks shall show'rs of honey weep,
And thro the matted grass the liquid gold
shall creep.⁷⁵

Dryden had elaborated Virgil's

et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella.⁷⁶

Paradise Lost also contributed to this passage, not

⁷²Thomson, Works, p. 49.

⁷³Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 40-44.

⁷⁴Thomson, Spring, p. 49.

⁷⁵Dryden, Poetical Works, p. 428.

⁷⁶Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 30.

only as a model for the blank verse, but also as a source of words and phrases. In Thomson's *Golden Age*, food was abundant; and

The rivers foamed with nectar; or diffuse
Silent and soft, the milky maze devolved.⁷⁷

This detail is not used by Virgil, but is probably based on Ovid's "flumina iam lactis, iam flumina nectaris ibant"⁷⁸ and influenced by Milton's

Rowling on orient pearl and sands of gold,
With mazy error under pendant shades,
Ran nectar.⁷⁹ crisped brooks

Thomson, used "devolved" in imitation of Milton's diction, which frequently includes uncommon words of Latin origin.⁸⁰

Continuing his account, Thomson tells that all things were harmless; the tiger was not savage, "nor his gamesome paw / Drove on the fleecy partners of his play." This is his version of "nec magnos metuent armenta leones;"⁸¹ but the "paw"

⁷⁷ Thomson, Works, p. 49.

⁷⁸ Metamorphoses, I, 111.

⁷⁹ Paradise Lost, IV, 237-40.

⁸⁰ Raymond Dexter Havens, although he does not include this instance, gives many similar examples of Miltonic diction in Thomson in The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (Cambridge, 1922), p. 137.

⁸¹ Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 22.

and the "play" suggest Milton's "Sporting the lion ramped,
and in his paw / Dandled the kid."⁸²

Thus, while the passage, as a whole, is a parallel of Virgil's Eclogue IV, both Dryden and Milton influenced the style and interpretation of the Latin model.

This paraphrase, treated above, was omitted from the 1744 edition of Thomson's poems; but the lines which preceded and followed it included Golden Age references which were retained in the later editions of the poem published during Thomson's lifetime.

Vegetarianism is the first of the Golden Age ideas which Thomson presented. The belief that early man had been vegetarian was first introduced into the Golden Age legend by Empedocles, who also emphasized pacificism as a characteristic of the primeval life.⁸³ This doctrine was adopted by Aratus, whose works came to the Romans in the translations of Germanicus, Cicero, and Avienus.⁸⁴ Finally, Ovid, obtaining the concept from Aratus or one of the Latin writers,⁸⁵ incorporated it into the Metamorphoses. Ovid's discussion is probably the source of Thomson's passage on

⁸² Paradise Lost, IV, 343-4.

⁸³ Lovejoy, Primitivism, pp. 32-3.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

⁸⁵ Wilmon Brewer, Ovid's Metamorphoses in European Culture, (Boston, 1933), I, 2-3.

the abstinence from meat:

The food of man
While yet he lived in innocence, and told
A length of golden years, unfleshed in blood,
A stranger to the savage arts of life,
Death, rapine, carnage, surfeit, and disease
The lord and not the tyrant of the world.⁸⁶

In a long passage⁸⁷ Ovid says in part:

At vetus illa aetas, cui fecimus aurea nomen,
fetibus arboreis et, quas humus educat, herbis
fortunata fuit nec polluit ora cruore.⁸⁸

Thomson goes on to describe the easy, pleasant life of the Golden Age, when

The first fresh dawn then waked the gladdened
race
Of uncorrupted man, nor blushed to see
The sluggard sleep beneath its sacred beam;⁸⁹
For their light slumbers gently fumed away,
And up they rose as vigorous as the sun,
Or to the culture of the willing glebe,
Or to the cheerful tendance of the flock.⁹⁰

⁸⁶Thomson, Works, p. 12.

⁸⁷Metamorphoses, XV, 75-142.

⁸⁸Ibid., 96-98.

⁸⁹Thomson himself was an indolent man is shown in "The Castle of Indolence," I, 68, p. 275.

⁹⁰Thomson, Works, p. 12.

Professor Havens attributed Thomson's indebtedness for this passage to Milton, who described the awakening of Adam and Eve in these lines:

Now Morn, her rosy steps in the eastern clime
Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearl,
When Adam waked, so custom'd; for his sleep
Was aery light, from pure digestion bred,
And temperate vapours bland, which the only sound
Of leaves and fuming rills, Aurora's fan,
Lightly dispersed, and the shrill matin song
Of birds on every bough.⁹¹

After awakening Eve, Adam reminded her of the enjoyable tasks in the field, which awaited them. The similarity in the work in the two passages and their attitude towards it make the parallel more evident.

Meanwhile the pleasures of the innocent primitives included song, dance, conversation, and pure love. This last detail is probably from Paradise Lost since it follows the other Miltonic passage in Spring. Next, Thomson extolled the absence of Crime; but, in a fashion which is typically his own, he combined it with the eighteenth century virtues of benevolence and reason:

Nor yet injurious act nor surly deed
Was known among these happy sons of heaven;
For reason and benevolence were law.⁹²

⁹¹Paradise Lost, V, 1-8.

⁹²Thomson, Works, p. 12.

The innate goodness of man in the Golden Age recalls his perfection in Virgil's Golden Age, when

si qua manent sceleris vestigia nostri,
inrita perpetua solvent formidine terras.⁹³

Surrounded by ideal climatic conditions,

o'er the mead
The herds and flocks commixing played secure.
This when, emergent from the gloomy wood,
The glaring lion saw, his horrid heart
Was meekened, and he joined his sullen joy.⁹⁴

This passage is apparently an amplification of Virgil's "nec magnos metuent armenta leones,"⁹⁵ or Dryden's translation, "and lowing herds secure from lions feed,"⁹⁶ the "secure" of which is found in Thomson's passage.

The next passage in Spring described music of the lute, the voice, the birds, and finally the wind and waves, but included no Golden Age references. This section of the poem ends with "Such were those prime of days."⁹⁷

⁹³Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 13-14.

⁹⁴Thomson, Works, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁵Virgil, Eclogues, IV, 22.

⁹⁶Dryden, Poetical Works, p. 428.

⁹⁷Thomson, Works, p. 13.

That Thomson did not consider the myth entirely seriously is shown by the lines which followed the paraphrase in the earlier editions. Originally they read:

But now whate'er these gaudy fables meant
And the white-minutes that they shadowed out
Are found no more among those iron times
Those dregs of life!⁹⁸

After the removal of the paraphrase, the lines became:

But now those white unblemished minutes, whence
The fabling poets took their golden age,
Are found no more amid these iron times,
These dregs of life!⁹⁹

An elaborate passage on the vices of the day follows and leads up to a description of the deluge. Since the time of the flood, the seasons have become severe; whereas,

Great Spring before
Greened all the year; and fruits and blossoms
blushed
In social sweetness on the self-same bough.¹⁰⁰

Eternal springtime was a feature of Ovid's Golden Age;¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid., Note 272, 273.

⁹⁹ Thomson, Works, p. 13. Dryden used the expression, "the dregs of life," to refer to the later years of a man's life in Aureng-Zebe, IV, 1. "White minutes" recalls "Time's whiter series" in Astraea Redux, p. 11 of Dryden's Works.

¹⁰⁰ Thomson, Works, p. 15.

¹⁰¹ "ver erat aeternum," Metamorphoses, I, 107.

but Professor Havens has shown the parallel of the latter part of the quotation with Paradise Lost:¹⁰²

goodliest trees, loaden with fairest fruit,
Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue,
Appeared.¹⁰³

Perhaps the everlasting Spring also is from the Garden of Eden, where

universal Pan,
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance,
Led on the eternal Spring.¹⁰⁴

Another long passage, in the same vein as the Metamorphoses, decried the eating of meat. These two passages follow the same general outline: (1) the abundance of vegetation available to man, (2) a justification of wild animals' consumption of flesh, (3) man's inborn sense of pity, (4) the necessity of slaying destructive animals, and (5) the cruelty of putting to death domestic beasts. On this final point, Thomson asked,

And the plain ox,
That harmless, honest, and guileless animal,
In what has he offended? he, whose toil,

¹⁰²Havens, Influence of Milton, p. 584.

¹⁰³Paradise Lost, IV, 147-9.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 266-9.

Patient and ever ready, clothes the land
 With all the pomp of harvest: shall he bleed,
 And struggling groan beneath the cruel hands
 Even of the clowns he feeds? And that, perhaps,
 To swell the riot of the autumnal feast,
 Won by his labour?¹⁰⁵

The same thought is expressed by Ovid in the speech of
 Pythagoras:

quid meruere boves, animal sine fraude dolisque,
 innocuum, simplex, natum tolerare labores
 immemor est demum nec frugum munere dignus,
 qui potuit curvi dempto modo pondere aratri
 rubicolam mactare suum, qui trita labore
 illa, quibus totiens durum renoverat arvom¹⁰⁶
 tot dederat messes, percussit colla securi

Thomson admitted his indebtedness when he said,

'tis enough
 In this late age, adventurous to have touched
 Light on the numbers of the Samian Sage.¹⁰⁷

The general outline of the two passages and the closeness of
 the phrasing show that his source was Ovid.

¹⁰⁵ Thomson, Works, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ Ovid, Metamorphoses, XV, 120-6.

¹⁰⁷ Thomson, Works, p. 17. The Samian sage is Pythagoras, who adopted and systematized the doctrines of Empedocles, believed in the transmigration of souls, the brotherhood of all living creatures and consequently in vegetarianism.

Delightfully inconsistent, Thomson turned from the vicious habit of meat-eating to the joys of fishing. Such divergent views are often combined in the Seasons. Thomson was an ardent Whig and an advocate of trade, industry, and commerce. Thus, much of his poetry supports the ideal of progress. However, since, especially during his early years in London, he saw financial depression and poverty for the masses, he occasionally distrusted the civilization in which he lived. Dissatisfied with his own times, he turned to the ideal past which he pictured in the Golden Age passages.¹⁰⁸

Since the Whigs claimed credit for the improved conditions brought about by the growth of commerce and industry, Thomson's enthusiasm for progress increased. He could observe the favorable changes in London, where he lived.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, most of his friends were Whigs, who encouraged his optimism. To his changing attitude may be attributed Thomson's deletion of the Virgilian paraphrase in the 1744 edition of his works. Thomson continually revised his poetry, and other alterations indicate a growing confidence in progress. As Professor McKillop has said, Thomson, in his treatment of the Golden Age, is a "Whig enthusiast for progress and a sentimental enthusiast

¹⁰⁸Raymond Dexter Havens, "Primitivism and the Idea of Progress," Studies in Philology, XXIX (January, 1932), pp. 41-52.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 45-6.

for simplicity and primitive virtue."¹¹⁰

The Golden Age legend never lost its attraction for Thomson; for in The Castle of Indolence, which was published only a few months before his death, he referred to the greed of his own period and to Astraea's departure to the mountains:

Outcast of Nature, Man! the wretched thrall
Of bitter-dropping sweat, of sultry pain,
Of cares that eat away the heart with gall,
And of the vices, an inhuman train,
That all proceed from savage thirst of gain:
For when hard-hearted Interest first began
To poison earth, Astraea left the plain;
Guile, Violence, and Murder seized on man,
And, for soft milky streams, with blood the rivers
ran.¹¹¹

For the thought of the last two lines Thomson is again indebted to the Metamorphoses, in which is the reference to streams of milk,¹¹² and in which Astraea is said to have abandoned the blood-soaked earth:

et virgo caede madentis
ultima caelestum terras Astraea reliquit.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Alan Dugald McKillop, The Background of Thomson's "Seasons" (Minneapolis, 1942), p. 89.

¹¹¹ Thomson, Works, p. 256.

¹¹² "flumina iam lactis," Metamorphoses, I, 111.

¹¹³ Metamorphoses, I, 149-50.

In The Castle of Indolence before the Knight of Arts and Industry arrived in Britain:

A sylvan life till then the natives led
 In the brown shades and greenwood forest lost,
 All careless rambling where it liked them most ----
 Their wealth the wild-deer bouncing through the
 glade;
 They lodged at large, and lived at Nature's cost.¹¹⁴

Except for the fact that the Britons hunted the deer, that period had the attributes of the Golden Age. However, the Knight immediately began to teach them arts and industry, which Thomson considered desirable.

Thomson was popular because he treated themes which were of current interest to the English people -- science, travel, patriotism, morality, religion, and nature.¹¹⁵ There was something to appeal to everyone. How great his popularity was, is indicated by the fact that Spring, which contains most of his Golden Age references, was published alone, or with other works of Thomson's, seventy-five times before 1800.¹¹⁶ Naturally his success led others to imitate his poetry.

¹¹⁴Thomson, Works, p. 284.

¹¹⁵Durling, Georgic Tradition, pp. 57-8.

¹¹⁶Havens, Influence of Milton, pp. 125-6.

CHAPTER IV

FROM POPE TO COWPER

Although the Golden Age influence is most apparent in Thomson's poetry references continued to be made to the myth throughout the eighteenth century. However, with increased interest in contemporary savages later in the period, interest in the Golden Age blended with and gave way to primitivism.

Pope, whose earlier use of the legend has been noted, again referred to it in his Essay on Man (1731); but in this poem the belief has been allied with deism:

Nor think in Nature's state they blindly trod,
The state of Nature was the reign of God.¹¹⁷

God's existence in Nature and his moral government in Nature are summed up in this couplet. However, Pope went on to discuss the qualities which characterized primitive man:

Pride was not then, nor arts, that pride to aid;
Man walked with beast, joint tenant of the shade;
The same his table, and the same his bed;¹¹⁸
No murder clothed him, and no murder fed.

¹¹⁷ Pope, Essay on Man, III, 147-8.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 151-5.

The absence of arts and the amicable relations between man and beast are reflections of the Golden Age. "Man walked with beast" reminds one of

And boys in flow'ry bands the tiger lead,
from the Messiah.¹¹⁹ However, it also resembles the description of brotherhood in the Metamorphoses:

cuncta sine insidiis nullamque timentia
fraudem
plenaque pacis erant.¹²⁰

The common shelter is that of the reign of Saturn as described by Juvenal:

cum frigida parvas
praeberet spelunca domos ignemque Laremque
et pecus et dominos communi clauderet
umbra.¹²¹

That killing animals for food is a crime is expressed in the speech of Pythagoras in the Metamorphoses:

heu quantum scelus est in viscera
viscera condi
congestoque avidum pinguescere
corpore corpus

¹¹⁹Pope, Messiah, l. 78.

¹²⁰Metamorphoses, XV, 102-3.

¹²¹Juvenal, Satires, VI, 2-4.

alteriusque animantem animantis
vivere leto!¹²²

Pope next contrasted man's early songs of thanksgiving in the open wood with later bloody sacrifices:

The shrine with gore unstain'd, with gold undrest,
Unbrib'd, unbloody, stood the blameless priest.¹²³

Pythagoras had bewailed the bloody offerings to the gods:

nec satis est, quod nefas committitur: ipsos
inscripsere deos sceleri numenque supernum¹²⁴
caede laboriferi credunt gaudere juvenci!

After mourning the cruel times which developed from this evil, since

The fury-passions from that blood began,¹²⁵
And turn'd on man a fiercer savage, man,

Pope discussed how Reason learned from Instinct or how man has progressed. This passage therefore does not accept the myth. Pope's

state of Nature is a sham reproduction of the golden age of poets, made to do duty in a scientific speculation.¹²⁶

¹²²Metamorphoses, XV, 88-90.

¹²³Essay on Man, III, 157-8.

¹²⁴Metamorphoses, XV, 127-9.

¹²⁵Essay on Man, III, 167-8.

¹²⁶Leslie Stephen, Alexander Pope (New York, n.d.), p.170.

Two more of Thomson's contemporaries wrote poems which are rather distantly related to the Golden Age legend. Thomas Tickell was imitating Milton in a poem on hunting, when, after a passage on Spring, he pictured the primeval world:

So swift, so sweet when first the world began
In Eden's bowers, when man's great sire assign'd
The names and nature of the brutal kind.
Then lion and lamb friendly walk'd their round,¹²⁷
And hares, undaunted lick'd the fondling hound.

This poem is undated, but was written before 1740, when Tickell died. Like Tickell, Samuel Boyse in an epistle to Lord Kinnaird referred to the Bible story in describing the first days of man:

Bless'd was the time, oh had that bliss remained
When Nature's fruits the lengthen'd life sustained;
Ere hate was known, or in his brother's blood
His cursed hands the wretched Cain embu'd;
But through the happy grove, serene and mild,
Man walk'd with man, ---- and all creation smil'd.¹²⁸

¹²⁷Thomas Tickell, "A Fragment of a Poem on Hunting, Chalmers, English Poets, XI, 112.

¹²⁸Samuel Boyse, "To the Right Honourable Charles, Lord Kinnaird, An Epistle," Chalmers, English Poets, XIV, 575.

"Man walked with man"¹²⁹ apparently reflects Pope's "man walked with beast."¹³⁰ The epistle objects to hunting and fishing, and praises the happy days of old. The plea against cruelty recalls Ovid, but no definite parallels appear.

In "The Enthusiast" (1744) Joseph Warton combined Golden Age ideas from Tibullus, Ovid, and Lucretius in a long description of primitive man:

Happy the first of men ere yet confin'd
To smoky cities; who in sheltering groves,
Warm caves, and deep-sunk vallies liv'd
and lov'd,
By cares unwounded.¹³¹

Warton has amplified Tibullus's

felices olim, Veneri cum fertur aperte
servire aeternos puduisse deos.¹³²

The "deep-sunk vallies"¹³³ are probably from the "umbrosa

¹²⁹ Ibid., l. 36.

¹³⁰ Essay on Man, III, 152.

¹³¹ Joseph Warton, "The Enthusiast," Chalmers, English Poets, XVIII, 160.

¹³² Tibullus, II, iii, 29-30.

¹³³ Warton, "The Enthusiast" p. 160.

gaudia"¹³⁴ later in the elegy. Next, Warton told of the food provided by Nature:

what the sun and showers,
And genial earth untillag'd could produce,
They gathered grateful, or the acorn brown,
Or blushing berry.¹³⁵

In the Metamorphoses Ovid had said:

ipsa quoque immunis rastroque intacto
nec ullis
saucia vomeribus per se dabat omnia
tellus,
contentique cibus nullo cogente creatis
arbutos fetus montanaeque fraga
legebant
cornaque et in duris haerentia mora
rubetis
et quae deciderant patula I ovis arbore
glandes.¹³⁶

The primitive men, according to Warton, might then drink from the clear stream or bathe with the nymphs in the stream.

With nymphs who fondly clasp'd their fav'rite
youths,
Unaw'd by shame, beneath the beechen shade,
Nor wiles, nor artificial coyness knew.
Then doors and walls were not.¹³⁷

¹³⁴Tibullus, II, iii, 72.

¹³⁵"The Enthusiast," p. 160.

¹³⁶Ovid, Metamorphoses, I, 101-6.

¹³⁷"The Enthusiast," p. 160.

Tibullus had expressed the same idea in:

tunc, quibus aspirabat Amor, praebebat
 aperte
 mitis in umbrosa gaudia valle
 Venus.
 nullus erat custos, nulla exclusura
 dolentes
 janua.¹³⁸

In the Golden Age, according to Warton, a girl neither feared parents and husband, nor worried about wealth:

Nor frown of parents fear'd, nor husband's threats;
 Nor had curs'd gold their-tender hearts allur'd.¹³⁹
 the melting maid

Ovid told of the father's severity and the maid's coldness until the rich lover came:

dum merces aberat, durus pater, ipsa
 severa,
 aerati postes, ferrea turris erat;
 sed postquam sapiens in munera
 venit adulter,
 praebuit ipsa sinus et dare iussa
 dedit.¹⁴⁰

Later in the same poem Ovid referred to his sweetheart's acceptance of a wealthy man, although she had told the poet

¹³⁸Tibullus, II, iii, 71-4.

¹³⁹"The Enthusiast," p. 160

¹⁴⁰Ovid, Amores, III, viii, 31-4.

that she feared her husband:

at nunc, exaequet tetricas licet illa Sabinas,
imperat, ut captae qui dare multa potest;
me prohibet custos, in me timet illa maritum.¹⁴¹

The "tender hearts"¹⁴² of "The Enthusiast" is close to Ovid's "mollities pectoris" in the line, "heu, ubi mollities pectoris illa tui?"¹⁴³ Warton's next lines, while similar in spirit to the Amores, have no definite references to Ovid.

Then beauty was not venal, Injur'd Love,
O! whither, god of raptures, art thou fled?
While Avarice waves his golden wand around,
Abhorr'd magician, and his costly cup
Prepares with baneful drugs, t' enchant the souls,
Of each low-thoughtful fair to-wed for gain.¹⁴⁴

Although the similarities are not so apparent as those already cited, there is a general resemblance between "O! whither, god of raptures art thou fled?"¹⁴⁵ and Ovid's "heu, ubi mollities pectoris illa tui."¹⁴⁶ Ovid's girl, called "avara"¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹Ibid., 61-3.

¹⁴²"The Enthusiast," p. 160.

¹⁴³Amores, III, viii, 18.

¹⁴⁴"The Enthusiast," p. 160.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Amores, III, viii, 18. Cf. note 142.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 1. 22.

or "greedy," is probably the inspiration for "Avarice" in Warton's poem. Love of money came into the world after Jupiter had overcome Saturn. Jupiter himself had appeared to Danae in a shower of gold.

Jupiter, admonitus nihil esse potentius
auro,
Corruptae pretium virginis ipse fuit.¹⁴⁸

Since Greed is associated with Jupiter's time, it belongs not to the Golden Age, but to the later periods.

Lucretius is the model for the next section^{of} "The Enthusiast":

In Earth's first infancy (as sung the bard,
Who strongly painted what he boldly thought),
Though the fierce north wind oft smote
with iron whip
Their shiv'ring limbs, though oft the
bristly boar
Or hungry lion 'woke them with howls,
And scar'd them from their moss-grown
caves to rove
Houseless and cold in dark tempestuous
nights
Yet were not myriads in embattl'd fields
Swept off at once, nor had the raging seas
Oe'rwhelmed the found'ring bark and shrieking
crew
In vain the glassy ocean smil'd to tempt

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 293.

The jolly sailor unsuspecting harm
 For commerce ne'er had spread her
 swelling sails
 Nor had the wondering Neriads ever
 heard
 The dashing oar.¹⁴⁹

In De Rerum Natura, as in "The Enthusiast," the wild
 beasts drove men from their caves:

sed magis illud erat curae, quod saecula ferarum
 infestam miseris faciebant saepe quietem.
 eiectique domo fugiebant saxa tecta
 spumigeri suis adventu validique leonis
 atque intempestata cedebant nocte paventes
 hospitibus saevis instrata cubilia fronde.¹⁵⁰

The life that Lucretius presented is more rugged than that
 which Warton described. In the Latin version beasts devoured
 men alive or left them so mangled that they finally died.
 However, as in the later poem, thousands of them did not die
 in battle nor on the seas:

at non multa virum sub signis milia ducta
 una dies dabat exitio nec turbida ponti
 aequora lidebant navis ad saxa virosque.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹"The Enthusiast," p. 160.

¹⁵⁰Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, ed. by W. H. D. Rouse
 (London, 1924), V, 982-7.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 999-1001.

Then it was all in vain for the laughing waves to entice
men to sea:

hic temere incassum frustra mare saepe coortum
saevibat leviterque minas ponebat inanis,
nec poterat quemquam placidi pellacid ponti
subdola pellicere in fraudem ridentibus undis.
improba naviregi ratio tum caeca iacebat.¹⁵²

Early men suffered hardships, such as hunger and pain,
according to Warton; but they were not as wicked as the
people of his time:

then famine, want, and pain
Sunk to the graves their fainting limbs;
but us
Diseaseful dainties, riot, and excess,
And feverish luxury destroy. In brakes
Or marshes wild unknowingly they cropp'd
Herbs of malignant juice; to realms remote
While we for powerful poisons madly roam,
From every noxious herb collecting death.¹⁵³

Lucretius contrasts the death of early man from poison with
the death of his contemporaries from excess, the accidental
eating of fatal herbs in the primitive period with intentional
poisoning in his day.

¹⁵²Ibid., 1002-6.

¹⁵³Warton, p. 160.

tum penuria deinde cibi languentia leto
 membra dabat, contra nunc rerum copia mersat.
 illi imprudentes ipsi sibi saepe venenum
 vergebant, nunc dant aliis sollertius ipsi.¹⁵⁴

Following Lucretius in this passage, Warton excluded war, navigation, excess, and murder from his picture of ancient times. The rejection of these qualities is in accordance with the Golden Age idea. However, the hardships which are included make this a period of hard rather than soft primitivism.

In his long description of primitive times Warton has proceeded from a happy perfect life similar to that presented by Tibullus and Ovid to the cruder existence portrayed by Lucretius. This progression from the true Golden Age picture to a savage life; that is the introduction of the theme, its repetition with the added love element, and its recurrence with the harder aspects of primitivism, seems to indicate that the Golden Age myth is used as a literary motif.

David Mallet, Thomson's friend, in Amyntor and Theodora (1747), combined hard and soft primitivism to describe the island of St. Kilda in the Hebrides:

Thrice happy land! though freezing on the verge
 Of arctic skies; yet blameless still of arts

¹⁵⁴Lucretius, ll. 1007-1010.

That polish to deprave, each softer clime,
 With simple Nature, simple Virtue blest!
 Beyond Ambition's walk: where never War
 Uprear'd his sanguine standard; nor
 unsheath'd
 For wealth or-power, the desolating sword.¹⁵⁵

The happy life of a simple people, untouched by war or arts, suggests a Golden Age; but the rigorous climate characterizes a life of hardship rather than ease.

In "Visions in Verse" (1751), Nathaniel Cotton described a rural scene, which in a general way had characteristics of the Golden Age:

A rural landscape I descry'd
 Drest in the robes of summer's pride;
 The herds adorned the sloping hills,
 That glitter'd with their tinkling rills;
 Below the fleecy mothers stray'd,
 And round their sportive lambkin play'd.
 Nigh to a murmuring brook I saw
 An humble cottage thatch'd with straw;
 Behind, a garden that supply'd
 All things for use, and none for pride:
 Beauty prevail'd thro' every part,
 But more of nature than of art.¹⁵⁶

The Golden Age theme had begun to blend into the nature poetry which characterized the latter eighteenth century. The pleasant climate, the contented animals, the convenient

¹⁵⁵David Mallet, Chalmers, English Poets, XIV, 25.

¹⁵⁶Nathaniel Cotton, "Health," "Visions in Verse," Chalmers, English Poets, XVIII, p. 33.

stream, the productive garden, and the charm of the scene recall the early ages, however.

In 1754 Francis Fawkes in "An Autumnal Ode" referred to life after death as an eternal spring upon the Isles of the Blest. This life he likened to a return of the Golden Age:

For yet a little while,
 Involv'd in wintry gloom,
 And lo! Another spring shall smile,
 A spring eternal bloom;
 Then shall he shine, a glorious guest,
 In the bright mansions of the blest,
 Where due rewards on virtue are bestow'd,
 And reap the golden fruits of what his
 autumn sow'd.¹⁵⁷

Horace had described the Isles of the Blest¹⁵⁸ in much the same terms that Ovid used for the Golden Age. In fact, Ovid obtained many of the details which he added to the myth from Horace's Epode XVI on the Islands of the Blest.¹⁵⁹

"Truth in Rhyme" (1761) by David Mallet, who earlier had used Golden Age details to describe the island of St. Kilda, flattered George III for recommending that the judges remain in office for good behavior, rather than until the

¹⁵⁷ Francis Fawkes, "An Autumnal Ode," Chalmers, English Poets, XVI, 244.

¹⁵⁸ Horace, Epode XVI, 42-66, The Odes and Epodes, ed. by E. Capps, et al. (London, 1921).

¹⁵⁹ Wilmon Brewer, Ovid's Metamorphoses in European Culture (Boston, 1933), I, 49.

death of the king. Naturally Mallet addressed the goddess of Justice:

Astraea, eldest born of Jove,
Whom all the gods revere and love,
Was sent, while man deserv'd their care,
On earth to dwell and govern there:
Till finding Earth by Heav'n unaw'd,
Till sick of violence and fraud,
Abandoning the guilty crew,
Back to her native sky she flew,
There, station'd in the Virgin-sign,
She long has ceas'd on Earth to shine,
Or if, at times, she deigns a smile
'Tis chief o'er Britain's favour'd isle.¹⁶⁰

Although Mallet recalled Astraea's departure from earth as recounted by Ovid,¹⁶¹ he used the reference as a literary theme to compliment the king.

In 1760 James Beattie published a translation of Virgil's Eclogue IV¹⁶² and his "Ode to Peace," which contains an invocation to the Golden Age:

Oh whither art thou fled, Saturnian reign!
Roll round again, majestic years!
To break fell Tyranny's corroding chain,
From Woe's wan cheek to wipe the bitter
tears,
Ye years, again roll round!¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰Mallet, "Truth in Rhyme," Chalmers, English Poets, XIV, 36.

¹⁶¹Metamorphoses, I, 149-50.

¹⁶²James Beattie, "Pastoral IV: Pollio," Chalmers, XVIII, 564.

¹⁶³Beattie, "Ode to Peace," Chalmers, XVIII, 539.

The plea for a return of the Golden Age is reminiscent of Virgil's Eclogue IV, from which the "Saturnian reign" probably was taken.¹⁶⁴ The fact that Beattie's translation appeared in the same year as the ode bears out this assumption. In another stanza of the poem, Beattie bewailed the departure of Peace from England and implied that wherever she has made her home there was natural vernal beauty:

From Albion fled, thy once-beloved retreat,
 What region brightens in thy smile,
 Creative Peace, and underneath thy feet,
 Sees sudden flowers adorn the rugged soil?
 In bleak Siberia blows
 Wak'd by thy genial breath the balmy rose?
 Wav'd over by the magic wand
 Does life inform fell Lybia's burning sand?
 Or does some isle thy parting flight detain,
 Where roves the Indian through primeval
 shades?
 Haunts the pure pleasures of the woodland
 reign,
 And led by reason's ray the path of Nature
 tread?¹⁶⁵

By referring to her withdrawal and by associating her with Spring and the beauties of nature, Beattie likened Peace to Astraea. The combination of Golden Age details with strange

¹⁶⁴Cf. "Saturnia regna," Eclogues, IV, 6.

¹⁶⁵Beattie, "Ode to Peace," p. 540.

and primitive contemporary life like that of the Indian and Siberian is becoming more common.¹⁶⁶

In Moral Eclogues (1782), John Scott had Theron note the remnants of the Golden Age in rural England:

How bless'd my lot, in these sweet fields
 assign'd,
 Where Peace and Leisure soothe the tuneful
 mind;
 Where yet some pleasing vestiges remain
 Of unperverted Nature's golden reign,
 When Love and Virtue rang'd Arcadian
 shades,
 With undesigning youths and artless maids!¹⁶⁷

That this passage apparently stems from no particular classical source is borne out by his biographer's belief that he knew little Latin.¹⁶⁸

Somewhat distrustfully, William Cowper in "The Task" wished that he had lived in the Golden Age:¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶Cf. Mallet's Amyntor and Theodora, above.

¹⁶⁷John Scott, "Eclogue I: Theron; or The Praise of Rural Life," Moral Eclogues, Chalmers, XVII, 456.

¹⁶⁸Mr. Hoole, his biographer thought that he knew "very little of Latin," according to Chalmers. See "Life of Scott" in Chalmers, English Poets, XVII, 446.

¹⁶⁹William Cowper, "The Task," IV, 515-8, Chalmers, English Poets, XVIII, 689.

Would I had fall'n upon those happier days,
That poets celebrate; those golden times,
And those Arcadian scenes, that Maro sings.¹⁷⁰

After some lines about nymphs and swains and Innocence dismissed from court, he expressed the futility of his wish:

Vain wish! those days were never: airy dreams
Sat for the picture: and the poet's hand,
Imparting substance to an empty shade,
Impos'd a gay delerium for a truth.¹⁷¹

Although he could not accept the Golden Age picture, he wished that he had lived at a time when the myth was believable:

Grant it: I still must envy them an age,
That favour'd such a dream; in days like these
Impossible, when Virtue is so scarce,
That to suppose a scene where she presides,
Is tramontane, and stumbles all belief.
No: we are polish'd now.

Cowper, who had lost faith in civilization, was unable to believe in the Golden Age, but wished that he might. On this regretful note, the myth of the Golden Age received its last mention in the poetry of the eighteenth century.

During the period the Golden Age had been treated most fully and sympathetically by Thomson. After his time, interest in the Golden Age gradually dwindled and merged with primitivism.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

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