

Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*: Images of Nero

- Language at beginning of Nero's reign

Calpurnius Siculus *Ecl.* 7 74-78 "Now if fortune has vouchsafed to you close sight of our worshipful Emperor-god, if there and then you marked his countenance and mien, tell me, come, tell me, Corydon, what I may deem to be the features of the gods."

Calpurnius Siculus *Ecl.* 7.82-4 "still, in a way, I looked upon his very self some distance off, and, unless my sight played me a trick, I thought that in one face the looks of Mars and of Apollo were combined."

Eins. Ecl. 1 (praise of Nero)

- esp. Golden Age imagery

Sen. *De Clem.* 2.1.3 "What an utterance! Worthy of the universal innocence of mankind, in favour whereof that long past age should be renewed" 4 "Now assuredly it were fitting that men, thrusting out covetousness from which springs every evil of the heart, should conspire for righteousness and goodness, that piety and uprightness along with honour and temperance should rise again, and that vice, having misused its long reign, should at length give place to an age of happiness and purity."

Eins. Ecl. 2.21ff. "Surely then the offspring of to-day fight with no doubtful hazard? Surely the blockish herd denies not to these times the realms of gold? The days of Saturn have returned with Justice the Maid: the age has returned in safety to the olden ways. With hope unruffled does the harvester garner all his corn-ears; the Wine-god betrays the languor of old age; the herd wanders on the lea; we reap with no sword, nor do towns in fast-closed walls prepare unutterable war: there is not any woman who, dangerous in her motherhood, gives birth to an enemy. Unarmed our youth can dig the fields, and the boy, trained to the slow-moving plough, marvels at the sword hanging in the abode of his fathers. Far from us is the luckless glory of Sulla and the threefold crisis when dying Rome despaired of her final resources and sold her martial arms. Now doth earth untilled yield fresh produce from the rich soil, now are the wild waves no longer angry with the unmenaced ship: tigers gnaw their curbs, lions endure the cruel yoke: be gracious, chaste Lucina: thine own Apollo is now king"

Calpurnius Siculus *Ecl.* 1.36-73 "Rejoice above all, ye denizens of the woods; rejoice, ye peoples who are mine! All the herd may stray and yet no care trouble its guardian: the shepherd may neglect to close the pens at night with wattles of ash-wood - yet no robber shall bring his crafty plot upon the fold, or loosing the halters drive the bullocks off. Amid untroubled peace, the Golden Age springs to a second birth; at last kindly Themis throwing off the gathered dust of her mourning, returns to the earth; blissful ages attend the youthful prince who pleaded a successful case for the Iuli of the mother town (of Troy). While he, a very God, shall rule the nations, the unholy War-Goddess shall yield and have her vanquished hands bound behind her back, and, stripped of weapons, turn her furious teeth into her own entrails; upon herself shall she wage the civil wars which of late she spread o'er the world: the battles like Philippi shall Rome lament henceforth: no triumph o'er her captive self shall she celebrate. All wars shall be quelled in Tartarean durance: they shall plunge the head in darkness, and dread the light. Fair peace shall come, fair not in visage alone- such as she often was when, though free from open war, and with distant foe subdued, she yet 'mid the riot of arms spread national strife with secret steel. Clemency has commanded every vice that wears the disguise of peace to betake itself afar: she has broken every maddened sword-blade. No more shall the funereal procession of a fettered senate weary the herdsman at his task; no more will crowded prison leave only a senator here and there for the unhappy Curia to count. Peace in her fullness shall come;

knowing not the drawn sword she shall renew once more the reign of Saturn in Latium, once more the reign of Numa who first taught the tasks of peace to armies that rejoiced in slaughter and still drew from Romulus' camp their fiery spirit- Numa who first hushed the clash of arms and bade the trumpet sound 'mid holy rites instead of war. No more shall the consul purchase the form of a shadowy dignity or, silenced, receive worthless fasces and meaningless judgement-seat. Nay, laws shall be restored; right will come in fullest force; a kinder god will renew the former tradition and look of the Forum and displace the age of oppression."

Calpurnius Siculus *Ecl.* 4.5-8 "For long, Meliboeus, have I been pondering verses, verses of no woodland ring but fit to celebrate the golden age, to praise even that very god who is sovereign over nations and cities and toga-clad peace."

Going back to Hesiod's myth of ages (*Works and Days* 109-201) and esp. Verg. *Ecl.* 4.8-17 (political context) "Only do thou, pure Lucina, smile on the birth of the child, under whom the iron brood shall first cease, and a golden race spring up throughout the world! Thine own Apollo is king. And in thy consulship, Pollio, yea in thine, shall this glorious age begin, and the mighty months commence their march; under thy sway, any lingering traces of our guilt shall become void, and release the earth from its continual dread. He shall have the gift of divine life, shall see heroes mingled with gods, and shall himself be seen of them, and shall sway a world to which his father's virtues have brought peace..." etc

Verg. *Ecl.* 4.46f. "'Age such as these, glide on!' cried to their spindles the Fates, voicing in unison the fixed will of Destiny!"

- political context?

Tac. *Annals* 13.2 (p.284f., tr. Grant) on start of Nero's reign: "Other murders were meant to follow. But the emperor's tutors, Sextus Afranius Burrus and Lucius Annaeus Seneca, prevented them. These two men, with a unanimity rare among partners in power, were, by different methods, equally influential. Burrus' strength lay in soldierly efficiency and seriousness of character, Seneca's in amiable high principles and his tuition of Nero in public speaking. They collaborated in controlling the emperor's perilous adolescence; their policy was to direct deviations from virtue into licensed channels of indulgence."