Publius Vergilius Maro/ “Vergil” (Virgil) 70-19 B.C.

William Blake (British, 1757–1827)
The Pastoral of Virgil, Eclogue I: The Blasted Tree and The Shepherd Chases Away a Wolf, 1821Wood engravings
Gift of The Print Club of Cleveland 1934.146

Fourth (“Messianic”) Eclogue (excerpts)

Muses of Sicily, essay we now a somewhat loftier task! Not all men love coppice or lowly tamarisk: sing we woods, woods worthy of a Consul let them be.

Now the last age by Cumae's Sibyl sung has come and gone, and the majestic roll of circling centuries begins anew: justice returns, returns old Saturn's reign, with a new breed of men sent down from heaven.

Only do thou, at the boy's birth in whom the iron shall cease, the golden race arise, befriend him, chaste Lucina; 'tis thine own Apollo reigns. And in thy consulate,

this glorious age; O Pollio*, shall begin, and the months enter on their mighty march.

Under thy guidance, whatso tracks remain of our old wickedness, once done away, shall free the earth from never-ceasing fear.

He shall receive the life of gods, and see heroes with gods commingling, and himself be seen of them, and with his father's worth reign o'er a world at peace. . . .

yet shall there lurk within of ancient wrong some traces, bidding tempt the deep with ships, gird towns with walls, with furrows cleave the earth . . .

new wars too shall arise, and once again some great Achilles to some Troy be sent.

Then, when the mellowing years have made thee man, no more shall mariner sail, nor pine-tree bark ply traffic on the sea, but every land shall all things bear alike . . .

Assume thy greatness, for the time draws nigh, dear child of gods, great progeny of Jove!. . . .

Begin to greet thy mother with a smile,
o baby-boy!  

(Translation, J.B. Greenough)