THE SPIRIT OF A TIME
JAMES THOMSON'S POETICAL USE OF PHILOSOPHICAL RELIGIOUS, SCIENTIFIC, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IDEAS

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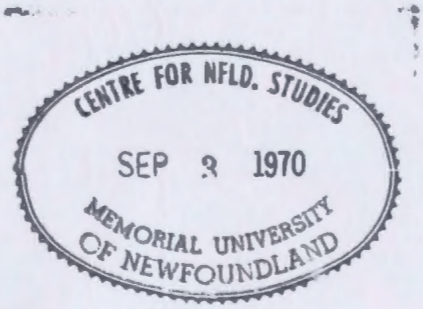
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By

DAVID ROSS SNOW, B.A. (Ed.), B.A.

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ABSTRACT

The poetry of James Thomson is an interesting subject for the study of the philosophical, religious, scientific, and socio-political ideas prevalent in the first half of the eighteenth century. Philosophy and science were rapidly completing the process of rehabilitating nature. Sir Isaac Newton and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, along with various other so-called "physico-theologians" and rationalists, were largely responsible for a new movement of "sympathy with nature". Thomson is a foremost example of how poets popularized the new movement by taking advantage of the aesthetic possibilities it afforded.

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how Thomson, as poet, is involved in a process of assimilation and transfiguration (by the use of various techniques that are peculiarly his own) of the knowledge and theories of his day. Shorter compositions such as To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton and Britannia illustrate Thomson's handling of the ideas mentioned above, but it is from The Seasons, A Hymn, Liberty, and The Castle of Indolence that we piece together his unique poetic vision of man, nature, and God. Thomson is eclectic, but his method consists of remoulding, juxtaposing, and fusing his raw materials. Like Shaftesbury, Thomson is concerned with

the natural harmony, order, and beauty of the works of creation; his indebtedness to the moralist's ideas emerges as the structural principles around which The Seasons is built.

Thomson's religion (strongly deistic) stems from his view of external nature, but he synthesizes ideas from various sources so long as they accord with this view of nature.

Ideas drawn from Newton's Optics, indeed all passages of scientific detail, are carefully worked into the total pattern of a poem and function as legitimate parts of that pattern. Thomson's use of Newtonian ideas of gravitation, the nature of light, and even of geographical materials, is related to his religious motif. Passages incorporating such material continue to emphasize the power, beneficence, beauty, harmony, and sublimity associated with nature, and its designer, the "all-perfect Hand".

Our subject is essentially the relationship of literature (in this case the poetry of Thomson) and ideas - ideas such as have traditionally aroused the feelings. The ideas of primitivism and progress in Thomson are not so unresolved, or such a flaw, as they have sometimes been thought to be. As a matter of fact, more than anything else they help illustrate his poetic technique. Other

examples of ideas which have traditionally aroused the feelings would be those of men's relation to external nature, the Deity, and to one another. It is with the latter example - men's relation to one another, their place in society, social and political organization - that Thomson is concerned in Liberty, and to some extent in Britannia and Rule, Britannia!. Through the assimilation of contemporary political events and philosophy, and the application of Shaftesburyian ethics to past and future history, Liberty emerges as a highly idealistic theory of social life and government, a complete imaginative whole. The primitivistic attitude sometimes evident in The Seasons appears in Liberty as the basis of his ideal theory of social and political liberty. The world view which emerges from the latter poem is consistent with that of The Seasons. The ideas underlying his theory of liberty and progress are part of his original scheme of cosmic unity and harmony.

The philosophical, religious, scientific, and socio-political "ideas" reflected in Thomson's poetry function as integral parts of the total patterns of these poems. They result in a poetry which is the emotional equivalent of the thought which it assimilates.

This thesis has been examined by

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D. R. S.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

Upon hearing that one Richard Glover was writing an epic poem, James Thomson is said to have remarked: "'He write an epic poem, a Londoner, who has never seen a mountain!'"[1] This little anecdote in itself reveals much about Thomson's attitude towards nature and what he considered to be the function of the poet. Thomson was not the originator of a new school of poetry, or a new school of taste for nature poetry, since poems such as Philips' Cyder (1708), and Gay's Rural Sports (1713), and the Pastorals (1709) of Pope, and especially the latter's Windsor Forest (1713), all dealt with similar subjects and were often quite successful as description. What was different about Thomson's poetry was the attitude taken towards his subject matter. With Thomson's Seasons the reader notices a higher degree of enthusiasm for the subject; nature is described for its own sake. His descriptions of nature may be said to be those of Lady Winchilsea (Nocturnal Reverie, 1713) and Dyer (Grongar Hill, 1726) matured.

Thomson has often been associated more with the so-called Romantic revival than with the classical tradition of his age because of his enthusiasm for nature,

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[1] As quoted by Alan D. McKillop, "Armstrong's Anecdotes of Thomson", Notes and Queries [hereafter cited as N&Q], CCIII (September, 1958), 376.

especially her wild and morbid aspects. But there was nothing, or at least very little, in Thomson's work which was at variance with the principles of neo-classicism. "Nature" was a key term of this school, and since the word had a variety of meanings, there was no reason why it should only be used in the manner of Pope.[2] The idea of truth to nature, the representation of things as they really are, was possibly the most important concept in the literary criticism of the age. There was nothing in such a notion which excluded the kind of poetry being written by Thomson.

In the following chapters we shall attempt to reveal the extent to which the major philosophical, religious, scientific, and socio-political ideas, immediately preceding, and during, Thomson's lifetime are incorporated into his poetry. We shall see how these ideas become at times little more than mere "ingredients" which are combined and juxtaposed by Thomson in an attempt to express a poetic view of nature and man and their relation to deity. In other words, we shall not be concerned with the history of ideas per se; rather we shall combine with this approach commentary on poetic technique and quality. It must not be

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[2]Arthur O. Lovejoy, "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm", in his Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), pp. 69-77.

forgotten that all works of art are historical objects. We have to recognize that our poet is "of an age". On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize that the historical approach does not in any way lead to a final and infallible interpretation. Literature is no substitute for sociology, politics, philosophy, science, or religion: "it has its own justification and aim."[3] Furthermore, "Literature is really not a reflection of the social process, but the essence, the abridgement and summary of all history."[4] This statement is of particular relevance to Thomson's Liberty, as we shall see later.

There may be some difficulty in determining Thomson's exact position in eighteenth-century poetry. That is, is he more in the tradition of Pope, or, say, Wordsworth? Simply putting a label on him such as "neo-classical", "pre-romantic", or "romantic" may be misleading. It would be better to think of him as an important figure in an age of transition. The labels mentioned above have their advantages, but an exaggerated use of the "time spirit" is undesirable in analysing and interpreting a poet's work. We shall avoid it as far as possible here, while at the same time attempting to show

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[3]René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (first published in 1942; 3rd ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1956), p. 124.

[4]Ibid., p. 95.

the relationship between Thomson and other poets and thinkers of the Enlightenment.

Since the concept of "Nature" is central in Thomson's work, as well as central in any consideration of eighteenth-century literature as a whole, a brief mention of this term in relation to classicism and romanticism may be of considerable value in "placing" Thomson in the poetry of that century. It should also help us to view him in relation to English poetry as a whole. In the eighteenth century in particular, one's philosophical view of nature had significant scientific, religious, and even (although more indirectly) social and political implications. The word "Nature" had (and still has) many different connotations. The meanings associated with its use in the following chapters should fall roughly in line with the "senses" listed below:

> 5. "Nature" as antithetic to man and his works; the part of empirical reality which has not been transformed (or corrupted) by human art; hence, the out-of-doors, "natural" sights and sounds.[5]
>
> 6. Intuitively known principles or standards of "taste" (analogous to the "law of nature" in morals), whereby that which is objectively and essentially (i.e., "by nature") beautiful is recognized.[6]

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[5]Lovejoy, op. cit., p. 71.

[6]Lovejoy, op. cit., p. 72.

C. "Nature" in general, i.e., the cosmical order as a whole, or a half-personified power (natura naturans) manifested therein, as exemplar, of which the attributes or modes of working should characterize also human art.[7]

16. The qualities exemplified by primitive man or primitive art.[8]

17. The universal and immutable in thought, feeling and taste; what has always been known, what everyone can immediately understand and enjoy; usually connected with the assumption that the universally valued is also the objectively beautiful (cf. 6, 7).[9]

The phrase "return to nature" is not really a good one; at least it has often been misinterpreted. This so-called "return" is usually regarded as a reaction from classicism, a phenomenon associated more with the Romantic school. Actually the concern with nature began much earlier than most people realize, and was more gradual and evolutionary than is commonly thought. This new concern with all aspects of nature, including uncultivated nature, was not so much a revival of past interest, or an imitation of earlier practices, as an outgrowth of rationalism. The new philosophy came into

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[7] Lovejoy, op. cit., p. 72.

[8] Lovejoy, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

[9] Lovejoy, op. cit., p. 73.

prominence during the latter years of the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth. It is often set in opposition to the tenets of the Romantic school. That the new concern with nature was not a revival of past attitudes and practices, but a relatively new movement which gained ground between the Restoration and the latter part of the eighteenth century, may be seen in the sudden interest shown in mountains in early and mid-century. The rapidly developing habit of viewing nature as a spiritual and moral force in relation to man also became of increasing significance at roughly the same time. Both new attitudes are closely connected with the great popularity of the new philosophy, or sprang from it.[10] Science and philosophy were rehabilitating nature, and the poets popularized the new movement by taking advantage of the aesthetic possibilities it afforded. Thus the new feeling for nature originated with the new philosophical conclusions.

Before Thomson's work, there was little attempt to interpret nature from the standpoint of its effect on man morally and spiritually. Until approximately 1725 the emphasis was on the picturesque. Poets were becoming more and more interested in faithfully reproducing the

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[10]Cecil A. Moore, "The Return to Nature in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century", Studies in Philology [hereafter cited as SP], XIV (July, 1917), 243-91.

objects of external nature, but further than that they did not go. Nature as a vast, universal, harmonious system was neglected.

One of the most important views which arose from an imitation of the new philosophy was that nature - all of nature, the beautiful and the terrible - was the revelation of God to man, and all was ultimately working together for good. Pantheism and deism originated from this poetic idea.

The apparent contradiction may easily be seen. The ideas indicated above stem from rationalist philosophy, but the intimate concern for nature has mainly been associated with romanticism. The latter is often characterized as a revolt from the influence of rationalism. So we can appreciate that it is unwise to make any clear-cut distinction between nature worship (romanticism if you like) and rationalist literary formulae.

Also connected with this whole question is that other unwise habit of sharply contrasting the "reason" of the rationalists or neo-classicists with the "imagination" of the romantics. When one considers the inclusiveness of the terms rationalism and romanticism, as well as the difficulties inherent in defining a term such

as imagination, any such sharp demarcations are almost sure to be invalid. For these reasons one has also to be careful in any discussion of the treatment of nature in eighteenth-century literature:

> The philosophy of the rationalists, considered historically, was, I hold, not only unopposed to an intimate appreciation of the outdoor world, but was actually the chief agent in eventually forcing the minute study and love of nature as a whole upon popular attention.[11]

It is in this light that we must place Thomson if we wish to determine his position in eighteenth-century poetry. The beginnings of romantic enthusiasm for both the beauties and deformities of nature, together with the belief in a moral and spiritual connection between nature and mankind, may be traced to rationalism and deism. Emphasis on the beauty of universal nature was a key factor in rationalist theory. Critics have been prone to selecting large passages of scientific subject matter from Thomson and asking the question, "Is this poetry?" They claim that there is a lack of emotion, or more absurdly, no sense of the mystery of nature. They err on two counts. First of all, such passages have to be related to the overall structure of the poem; and secondly, it is <u>because</u> of the poet's sense of mystery that he sometimes provides

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[11] Moore, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 250.

us with these minute descriptions. Furthermore, the most frequent and noticeable technique employed by Thomson is that of presenting a vast, general view rather than reflecting an interest in the minutely scientific for its own sake. Thomson's attitude and technique closely parallel Shaftesbury, of whom Moore says the following:

> And in spite of their suspicion of the word mystery as applied to theology, Deists did not cut themselves off from an imaginative interest in the mysterious processes of nature. It is a habit of critics to speak of the rationalistic conception as if it were diametrically opposed to the romantic . . . Shaftesbury is a clear illustration of the fact that the so-called rationalistic and the imaginative conception exist side by side. Rather they are two successive steps of one interpretative process, the rationalistic conclusion serving as a basis of fact for the more imaginative and intensive statement.[12]

The artistic possibilities of what has been said so far began to be manifested early in the century. Although they did not achieve the same degree of success as that enjoyed by Thomson, Blackmore, Needler, Parnell, Philips, and Lady Winchilsea had all written poems on subjects similar to that of The Seasons. But it was Thomson who undertook to make genuine poetry out of ideas in the works of Shaftesbury, Newton, and the ethical-rationalists.

How did details of the new philosophy and the

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[12] Ibid., p. 260.

new aesthetic anticipate the poetry of the later Romantics? To begin with, the scientific and philosophic discoveries involved an identification of beauty and truth. The poetic treatment of nature included the concept of "utility". This notion, which originated with the rationalists, and was an apologetic aspect of the rehabilitation of nature, held that all forms and parts of nature serve some purpose in the total harmony:

> Let no presuming impious railer tax
> Creative Wisdom, as if aught was formed
> In vain, or not for admirable ends.
> (Summer, ll. 318-20);[13]

Shaftesbury held that we can feel the presence of divinity in wild and solitary places. A quite similar reverential feeling may be observed Thomson:

> Oh! talk of him in solitary glooms,
> Where, o'er the rock, the scarcely-waving pine
> Fills the brown shade with a religious awe.
> (A Hymn, ll. 42-44)

It was Shaftesbury's deism and the writings of other rationalists which began this movement of "sympathy with nature" described above. There grew out of this a sympathy with lower animals, a sentiment of which there is plenty of evidence in Thomson. Such tendencies in poetry are important aspects of romanticism. However,

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[13] James Thomson, The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1908). Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

as we have shown, they grew out of the new philosophy. By mid-century nature was taking on new importance as a result of the popularization of the new science and philosophy.

One of the most important questions for our purposes here is whether or not the poet should avoid close connection with scientific discovery. A popular misconception is that the "imaginative" element is what distinguishes so-called romantic poetry from other poetry which is more prosaic, or which has more of a rationalistic-scientific subject matter. But do science and philosophy necessarily preclude poetry? Here are Wordsworth's thoughts on the matter:

> The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings.[14]

Thomson, like Wordsworth later, was involved in the new process of assimilation and transfiguration. Indeed he was the first important poet in this respect in the

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[14]William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads (1800)", The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. E. De Selincourt (in five volumes, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940-49), II, 396-97.

eighteenth century. Science provided a larger scope for his imagination. The best place to look for his interpretation of nature and man, and their adaptation to each other, is in the more philosophical passages. But, to keep in mind what we said at the beginning, philosophy is not our main concern. Our interest lies in what the poet does with philosophical ideas.

It was also stated earlier on that we would try to place Thomson in the developing tradition of English poetry, but not too arbitrarily. The following comment seems adequate in this connection:

> Sometimes he is cited as the first of the romanticists. It is recognized also that he is a Deist. But the two statements are never thoroughly co-ordinated. The truth is, Thomson was a forerunner of the romanticists in his treatment of nature because he was the first English poet to reflect at all fully the romantic tendencies inherent in Deism.[15]

Thomson was influenced by Virgil, Lucretius, the Book of Job, Milton, Newton, Locke, physico-theologians like John Ray and William Derham, and the third Earl of Shaftesbury. Of these Shaftesbury and Newton were most significant from the standpoint of Thomson's philosophical and scientific ideas. In the following chapter we shall discuss the influence of Shaftesbury on Thomson. The former's Characteristicks represents a combination of

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[15]Moore, op. cit., p. 287.

reason and enthusiasm, orthodoxy and liberalism, in addition to a considerable amount of Platonism. Benevolism is the most noticeable aspect of his politics and morals. Shaftesbury's world, rather than being part of a cold, mechanistic universe, is one endowed with harmony by the Supreme Being. He refutes Hobbes by maintaining the existence of the soul of man and innate ideas. Optimism is his main theme and this is diffused throughout his ideas on unity, harmony, benevolence, the "moral sense", virtue, and the sublime. Our purpose will be to see how Thomson draws on the moralist's theory of nature and benevolence and presents his Seasons, in particular, in a tone which is quite similar to parts of the Characteristicks.

Thomson's theology, at least as far as we can deduce from his poetry, includes inspirational, deistical, and in a very few instances, pantheistical elements. These ideas will constitute the subject of the third chapter.

From Sir Isaac Newton the poets and intellectuals of Thomson's day drew evidence of the goodness and omnipotence of God. Thomson's sometimes vast, general descriptions of landscape and cosmos reflect the influence of the author of the Principia. As Thomas Rundle said, "'Nature and its explainer, and its author are his themes.'"[16]

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[16] Letters of Thomas Rundle, 1789,ii,77 quoted by Douglas Grant, James Thomson (London: The Cresset Press, 1951), p. 109.

Newton's depiction of an illimitable and ordered universe lead Thomson to frequent intervals of joyous praise of the Creator. As the fourth chapter ought to make clear, much of his poetic imagery may be traced to Newton's theory of the heavens and the nature of light. The second section of the chapter will attempt to show how Thomson reworks geographical materials.

In addition to his tremendous faith in Britain's future as a great commercial nation, his delight at the growth of her prosperous towns and cities, and his admiration for the new scientific achievements, Thomson's poetry also reflects a strong primitivistic strain. Critics have long noticed his apparent confusion of the notions of primitivism and progress. We shall attempt to account for Thomson's seemingly unresolved attitude, not only from the standpoint of the history of ideas, but also in relation to poetic technique. Thomson was possibly the most patriotic English poet of his century. The political ideas of the author of Rule, Britannia! and Liberty are based largely on the political and social ethics of Shaftesbury, and in a more general way, on those of Locke. An ardent believer in liberty for her own sake, Thomson thought too that she formed the necessary basis for a country's success in commerce and the fine arts. There are passages of "Whig Panegyric" in all of his long poems;

and, of course, Liberty, very much a poem of the Opposition, outlines in detail his political and social theory. These and related ideas will be dealt with in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter will act as a summary.

I stated near the outset that our problem here is one of how ideas enter into literature. Do the ideas of Shaftesbury, Newton, and others remain mere raw materials dragged in by Thomson to pad his long poems? It certainly would not appear so, since the poet spent a large portion of his lifetime revising The Seasons. Although he was greatly mistaken, he considered Liberty his best work. He laboured for two years on this poetical description of an ideal social and political system. What I hope will be made clear throughout the following chapters is that the philosophical, religious, scientific, and socio-political ideas with which Thomson works are, in the main, constitutive - incorporated into the overall structure of the poems. They cease to be ideas in the usual sense and become (1) infused with genuine poetic sentiment, or else (2) organic parts of a larger poetic whole.

CHAPTER II:

SHAFTESBURYIAN INFLUENCE: NATURAL AND MORAL HARMONY; BENEVOLENCE

> The generous Ashley thine, the friend of man,
> Who scanned his nature with a brother's eye,
> His weakness prompt to shade, to raise his aim,
> To touch the finer movements of the mind,
> And with the moral beauty charm the heart.
>
> Summer, ll. 1551-55

It would not be true to say that Thomson adopts a particular and consistent philosophy of man and nature. The philosophy in his work is an amalgamation of several views of the cosmos and the earth - the Shaftesburyian notion, Newtonianism, and the Platonic conception of the Great Chain of Being. In order to break the monotony of description in The Seasons, he employs the technique of interweaving moral reflections and sentimental anecdotes. But these digressions are not always included for this reason alone. They are usually placed deliberately in a certain position in the poem to provide juxtaposition or illustration with respect to a previous scene. Thomson is aware of the analogy between man's life and the motions of the seasons; between the physical and moral worlds. The main unifying factor of The Seasons is the poet's philosopical attitude towards nature, the structure of the universe, or world order. This undergoes considerable change, however, from the first edition of Winter in 1726 to the final edition of the whole poem in 1746. Patricia Meyer Spacks has attempted to show (not always successfully) that Thomson sometimes deals with nature philosophically and aesthetically, yet with little relation to man. Furthermore he deals with man and his problems while tending to disregard nature. She views his most important

quality as a poet in the following manner:

> The most effective poetic fusion of aesthetic, emotional, and moral outlook takes place in The Seasons when nature is conceived as a vast pattern of order including man, and it is this concept which seems most essentially important to the poet.[1]

It is more accurate to describe Thomson's rendering of nature as philosophical and emotional rather than merely objective. For him it is a source of profound emotions and illustrative of the power of the Universal Soul:

> Meantime, light shadowing all, a sober calm
> Fleeces unbounded ether; whose least wave
> Stands tremulous, uncertain where to turn
> The gentle current; while, illumined wide,
> The dewy-skirted clouds imbibe the sun,
> And through their lucid veil his softened force
> Shed o'er the peaceful world. Then is the time
> For those whom wisdom and whom nature charm
> To steal themselves from the degenerate crowd,
> And soar above this little scene of things—
> To tread low-thoughted vice beneath their feet,
> To soothe the throbbing passions into peace,
> And woo lone Quiet in her silent walks.
>
> (Autumn, ll. 957-69)

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[1] Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Varied God: A Critical Study of Thomson's 'The Seasons' (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 6.

There is nothing dull and spiritless about nature in this scene. Nevertheless we easily sense the atmosphere of "sober calm", the dying of the year. The transition from straight description to the effect of the scene on man is pleasingly natural.

There is a movement very early in the eighteenth century which possibly has as its ultimate aim the dethronement of reason as the dominant faculty and an assertion of the importance of imagination and feeling.[2] Lord Shaftesbury is the most important figure in this connection. Thomson applies most of the former's notions to his poetry. Shaftesbury's method is to attack, under the guise of reason herself, tyrannical reason. This is why we notice, to our occasional confusion, that Thomson himself sometimes appears to be exalting reason above all else; whereas at other times he emphasizes the heart, feelings, emotions, and sympathy. Douglas Grant has made a relevant statement with regard to early eighteenth-century

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[2] Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England (first published in 1946; Harper Torchbooks Edition, New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 50-57.

attitudes. He says:

> the eighteenth century's sensibility was peculiarly susceptible to derangement, because its insistence upon rationality and its refusal to recognize the passions left it at their mercy when they did strike from the backward, unexplored hinterland of the mind.[3]

Two of Shaftesbury's essays, An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit and The Moralists, first appear in 1709. The essential ideas developed throughout those two works are as follows:

(1) a benevolent divinity and ethical code to replace revealed religion;

(2) an expression of enthusiasm in relation to the Supreme Being and his Creation;

(3) the possibilities inherent in natural religion (which are in line with the notions advanced earlier by Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the Cambridge Platonists) and natural laws;

(4) a well-ordered universe with God seen as the Supreme Artist;

(5) the existence of innate ideas;

(6) an emphasis on Virtue, Truth, and Beauty.

Shaftesbury's philosophy is an argument against Hobbes, and, unlike that of the Cambridge Platonists, is concerned more with life, society, and manners than with theological debate. Hobbes and Locke were unsympathetic

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[3]Grant, op. cit., p. 207.

to imagination and the arts, and this is the sort of thinking which Shaftesbury tries to rectify. Shaftesbury reacts also against the attitude developed by the Puritans in the seventeenth century towards beauty of any sort - that is, their distrust of it. He attempts to restore man's feeling for natural beauty. A proper understanding of this requires a somewhat closer acquaintance with his cosmology.

By the end of the seventeenth century, mechanism was the vogue and nature was viewed for the most part as a machine. Shaftesbury attempts a new view of nature. This is mainly outlined in The Moralists, a dialogue in the Platonic style. The author's manner may be described as rhapsodical:

> " O GLORIOUS Nature! supremely Fair, and
> " sovereignly Good! All-loving and All-lovely,
> " All-divine! Whose Looks are so becoming,
> " and of such infinite Grace; whose Study
> " brings such Wisdom, and whose Contemplation
> " such Delight; whose every single Work affords
> " an ampler Scene, and is a nobler Spectacle
> " than all which ever Art presented!———O
> " mighty Nature! Wise Substitute of Providence!
> " impower'd Creatress! Or Thou impowering
> " DEITY, supreme Creator! Thee I invoke,
> " and Thee alone adore. To thee this Solitude,
> " this Place, these Rural Meditations are
> " sacred; whilst thus inspir'd with Harmony
> " of Thought, tho unconfin'd by Words, and in
> " loose Numbers, I sing of Nature's Order in
> " created Beings, and celebrate the Beautys
> " which resolve in Thee, the Source

" and Principle of all Beauty and Perfection...."[4]

The two speakers in the dialogue are Theocles (Shaftesbury) and Philocles, the latter explaining their discussion in a letter to his friend, Palemon.

In Shaftesbury's system, rather than an analogy of nature and machine there is the analogy of nature and the human body:

> I consider, That as there is one general Mass, one Body of the Whole; so to this Body there is an Order, to this Order a MIND: That to this general MIND each particular-one must have relation;
> (The Moralists, Pt. 3, Section I, Characteristicks, II, 358-9)

> "AND since all Hope of this were vain
> " and idle, if no universal Mind presided;
> " since without such a supreme Intelligence
> " and providential Care, the distracted
> " Universe must be condemn'd to suffer infinite
> " Calamitys; 'tis here the generous Mind labours
> " to discover that healing Cause by which the
> " Interest of the Whole is securely establish'd,
> " the Beauty of Things, and the universal
> " Order happily sustain'd...."
> (The Moralists, Pt. I, Section 3, Characteristicks, II, 213)

As the mind animates the body, so there is a governing spirit diffused throughout nature. Shaftesbury comes close to identifying God and Nature; that is, this

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[4]The Moralists, Pt. 3, Section I, Characteristicks, II, 345. All quotations from Shaftesbury in this and the following chapters are taken from Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (in three volumes, 5th ed.; 1732).

mind diffused throughout nature is God immanent in nature. Dorothy Schlegel writes, "Shaftesbury retained the traditional God of the deists, a divinity who permeates the universe and yet is outside of his creation."[5] His God is mysterious, all-powerful, all-just, and according to his view, the world was not formed from the casual or accidental coming together of atoms. This is one important aspect on which he disagrees with Lucretius, who also appears to have had an influence on Thomson.

In Shaftesbury's cosmology God is seen as the Supreme Artist:

> For we our-selves are notable Architects in Matter, and can shew lifeless Bodys brought into Form, and fashion'd by our own hands: but that which fashions even Minds themselves, contains in it-self all the Beautys fashion'd by those Minds; and is consequently the Principle, Source, and Fountain of all Beauty.
> (The Moralists, Pt. 3, Section 2, Characteristicks, II, 408)

It is easy to see the implications of this for aesthetics and literary criticism:

> The first and obvious result of Shaftesbury's view of nature, so far as aesthetics is concerned, is that nature was no longer regarded as something to be exploited and utilized; not something merely to be manipulated for man's benefit, but an object to be contemplated for its own sake.[6]

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[5]Dorothy B. Schlegel, Shaftesbury and the French Deists (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1956), p. 81.

[6]R. L. Brett, The Third Earl of Shaftesbury (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), p. 67.

God is an artist and nature a work of art, therefore there must be a creative process going on in nature. Any imitation of the latter has to be regarded as creation. Shaftesbury conceives of an ideal world, the objects of this one being merely temporal and spatial manifestations of the ideal, living force:

> No wonder, reply'd he, if we are at a loss, when we pursue the Shadow for the Substance. For if we may trust to what our Reasoning has taught us; whatever in Nature is beautiful or charming, is only the faint Shadow of that First Beauty.
> (The Moralists, Pt. 3, Section 2, Characteristicks, II, 395)

Since his main theme is optimism, he recognizes no final, fundamental, and independent existence of evil. Everything in the universe contributes towards a totality, a harmony, and all is ultimately good. As shown by the unity, harmony, and order of the universe, God is benevolent, the Universal Spirit is universal benevolence. Why, if such is the case, is there so much wickedness around us; and why is it that the "good" man often suffers?

> THEREFORE if any Being be wholly and really ILL, it must be ill with respect to the Universal System; and then the System of the Universe is ill, or imperfect. But if the Ill of one private System be the Good of others; if it makes still to the Good of the general System, (as when one Creature lives by the Destruction of another; one thing is generated from the Corruption of another; or one planetary System or Vortex may swallow up another) then is the Ill of that private System no real Ill in it-self; any more than the pain of breeding Teeth is ill, in a System

> or Body which is so constituted, that without this occasion of Pain, it wou'd suffer worse, by being defective.
> (An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit, Bk. I, Pt. 2, Section I, Characteristicks, II, 20)

Shaftesbury does not say specifically that evil is non-existent. From man's point of view it is very real, but ultimately it does not exist. It is not of the whole; not of the ultimate structure of reality. Plagues, earthquakes, and the death of the young and good are only partial evils, all part of the total harmony, the flux of things. The conflict between virtue and "evil" is a necessity. If the order of the universe is founded on contrarities, then all parts of nature should be admired by the artist. The awful, the ugly and rugged, should all be worthy of contemplation. This is the beginning of an attitude which is to become popular for the remainder of the century and beyond.

Shaftesbury's theory of morals is outlined in his Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit. It is with natural man that he is concerned, and his system is essentially modified Platonism. Virtue is independently good, immutable, and eternal, as well as intrinsically beautiful. As such it should be pursued for the happiness it brings the individual, regardless of future rewards and punishments as taught by orthodox Christianity. He believes it natural to wish to be virtuous, since it produces immediate

satisfaction or happiness. In its application to the realm of aesthetics, this means that the Good and the Beautiful are one. Physical and moral harmony are related; all part of the one harmonious whole.

Benevolence is the highest virtue. In opposition to Hobbes, Shaftesbury says that the "social state" is a natural desire of man:

> In short, if Generation be natural, if natural Affection and the Care and Nurture of the Offspring be natural, Things standing as they do with Man, and the Creature being of that Form and Constitution he now is; it follows, " That Society must be "also natural to him;" And That out of "Society and Community he never did, nor "ever can subsist."
> (The Moralists, Pt. 2, Section 4, Characteristicks, II, 318-19)

Unselfishness, or the desire to promote the welfare of society, is necessary to the happiness of the individual. It is this teaching which figures importantly in Thomson's ethics and political ideas.

Shaftesbury attempts to establish the merits of man by pleading his cause in the face of traditional religious ideas and the Hobbesian philosophy. Thus he speaks of man's "moral sense". This "moral sense" represents a compromise between reason and feeling, and is part of his theory of innate ideas. He represents the

first real influence with regard to that part of ethics which deals with immediate feeling and "sentiment", and is credited with the distinction of being the originator of eighteenth-century benevolism and sentimentalism.

The first translation of the Longinian treatise On the Sublime appeared in England in 1652; it was made by John Hall. But the sublime really came to England from France in Boileau's translation of Longinus(1674). J. Pulteney translated Boileau's version into English in 1680. There were numerous editions published in English throughout the eighteenth century. Longinus' work would have been well known to Dennis, Shaftesbury, and Addison. But the "sublime" of Longinus undergoes considerable change in meaning during the period of Shaftesbury and Addison. The following is the difference between Longinus and Shaftesbury in this respect. For Shaftesbury the term sublime appears to be more than a particular style of writing, more than a rhetorical idea; it is associated with an aesthetic quality.[7] It has to do with a peculiar feeling or attitude in face of

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[7] Ibid., pp. 145-64. From this one can see the close relationship between the ideas of Shaftesbury and Addison. "The sublime emerged from Addison's hands, definitely related to nature, to mass, and to space, and with the usual accretion of emotional effects which the age liked to find in sublimity." Quoted from Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime (first published in 1935; Ann Arbor Paperbacks, Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 59.

the idea of infinity, the awful or great; in short, an aesthetic view of nature. It is an intuition of the vastness of nature and the universe. The Moralists reflects Shaftesbury's interest in all aspects of nature. He travels to all parts of the globe and describes contrasting scenes and seasons:

> "HERE let us leave these Monsters (glad
> " if we cou'd here confine 'em!) and detesting
> " the dire prolifick Soil, fly to the vast
> " Desarts of these Parts. All ghastly and
> " hideous as they appear, they want not their
> " peculiar Beautys. The Wildness pleases. We
> " seem to live alone with Nature. We view her
> " in her inmost Recesses, and contemplate her
> " with more Delight in these original Wilds,
> " than in the artificial Labyrinths and feign'd
> " Wildernesses of the Palace. The Objects of
> " the Place, the scaly Serpents, the savage
> " Beasts, and poisonous Insects, how terrible
> " soever, or how contrary to human Nature, are
> " beauteous in themselves, and fit to raise our
> " Thoughts in Admiration of that Divine
> " Wisdom, so far superior to our short Views...."
> (The Moralists, Pt. 3, Section I,
> Characteristicks, II, 388)

Shaftesbury's conception of the sublime and its relation to nature stems from his philosophic optimism. All objects of external nature are part of the great and good design of God; therefore they have their peculiar kind of beauty - even the terrible. In a way this anticipates romanticism, whereas the concept of harmony is a neo-classical ideal.

Thomson's conception of the sublime appears to be quite similar to Shaftesbury's. The poet also experiences a sort of pleasing dread at the sight or thought

of hideous, vast deserts and ghastly objects. As the result of such attitudes, the imaginary tour of the universe is quite common in eighteenth-century nature poetry. In The Moralists "wild nature" reveals God as much as anything else. So it is in The Seasons. The contemplator of these "wild" scenes is soon led into ecstatic musings.

2

The most important aspects of Shaftesbury's philosophy which had a direct influence on Thomson were: (1) the former's view of the natural harmony, order, and beauty manifested in the works of creation; (2) the deism which followed from this view; and (3) his theory of morals. It is difficult to discuss Thomson's philosophical view of nature, his religious ideas, or his social and political theory, in relation to Shaftesbury, without discovering that the various ideas overlap considerably. Shaftesbury's view of nature gives rise to his religious ideas, and his political ideas are derived from his ethical theory. The remainder of this chapter consists of a discussion of Thomson's poetry as it reflects Shaftesbury's ideas of world order, beauty, and morality. As a part of Chapter V we shall see how Shaftesbury's ethical theory is reflected in Thomson's social and political ideas.

Possibly the earliest manifestation of Shaftesbury's influence on Thomson may be seen in The Works and Wonders of Almighty Power (1724). In The Moralists Shaftesbury writes as follows:

> "THY Being is boundless, unsearchable,
> " impenetrable. In thy Immensity all Thought
> " is lost; Fancy gives o'er its Flight: and
> " weary'd Imagination spends it-self in vain;
> " finding no Coast nor Limit of this Ocean, nor
> " in the widest Tract thro' which it soars,
> " one Point yet nearer the Circumference than
> " the first Center whence it parted.———Thus
> " having oft essay'd, thus sally'd forth into
> " the wide Expanse, when I return again
> " within my-self, struck with the Sense of this
> " so narrow Being, and of the Fulness of that
> " Immense-one; I dare no more behold the
> " amazing Depths, nor sound the Abyss of
> " DEITY.———..."
> (Pt. 3, Section I, Characteristicks, II, 345-46)

And in Thomson's poem we have this close parallel:

> Gladly would I declare, in loftly strains,
> The power of Godhead to the sons of men.
> But thought is lost in its immensity;
> Imagination wastes its strength in vain;
> And fancy tires, and turns within itself,
> Struck with the amazing depths of Deity!
> (ll. 7-12)

The whole of this poem closely parallels passages from The Moralists.[8] Indeed, Thomson introduces little, if anything, that might be called original. Nevertheless the poem is interesting, since it looks forward to The Seasons. Phrases such as the following indicate the

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[8] See Herbert Drennon, "The Source of James Thomson's The Works and Wonders of Almighty Power", Modern Philology [hereafter cited as MP], XXXII (August, 1934), 33-36.

direction of the young poet's interests, and it is these very subjects which are explored with diligence and beauty in his mature work: "the universal frame"; "nature"; "The power of Godhead"; "the bulky mass of matter"; "the rules of motion"; "the sources of the light"; and "The mysteries I must not comprehend". The poem's passive-contemplative attitude (it is not wholly lacking in emotion either) is indicative of what is to come later.

The influence of Shaftesbury is not as marked in Spring, the third poem in the order of writing, as in the poems on the other three seasons; but there are passages which indicate how Thomson's aesthetic appreciation is intensified by his philosophical awareness of the universe as ordered perfection:

> Till, in the western sky, the downward sun
> Looks out effulgent from amid the flush
> Of broken clouds, gay-shifting to his beam.
> The rapid radiance instantaneous strikes
> The illumined mountain, through the forest streams,
> Shakes on the floods, and in a yellow mist,
> Far smoking o'er the interminable plain,
> In twinkling myriads lights the dewy gems.
> Moist, bright, and green, the landscape laughs around.
> Full swell the woods; their every music wakes,
> Mixed in wild concert, with the warbling brooks
> Increased, the distant bleatings of the hills,
> In hollow lows responsive from the vales,
> Whence, blending all, the sweetened zephyr springs.
> (ll. 189-202)

These lines describe the sights and sounds of a landscape following a spring rainstorm. Such a storm is an example of nature's benevolence, of universal bounty.

The earth is once more "deep enriched", to use a phrase of Thomson's which immediately precedes those lines. We sense Thomson's belief in a powerful force behind the external objects which are its manifestation, and it is from this force that they take their meaning. In short, the poet's aesthetic appreciation is related to his philosophical view of nature, but not necessarily dependent upon it. The passage is a skilful portrayal of the transformation of the face of nature: the sudden brightness, gaiety, and music which is really what we feel ourselves when we see the sun following a storm. This is achieved partly through the use of personification.

As we have seen in the Introduction, many poets of the first half of the eighteenth century begin to view nature in a new perspective, as less alien. This is shown in the poems of John Philips, Sir Richard Blackmore, Henry Needler, Parnell, and even Pope. Their descriptions of her become more accurate. Thomson's final revisions of The Seasons, when compared with many passages in the earlier editions, reveal how he was influenced by this new attitude more and more as time went by.[9] In the main the revisions deal with the sublime, the picturesque, the varying of a pictorial design of a landscape. Thomson creates new landscapes which emphasize the irregularity and sublimity

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[9]Jim Corder, "A New Nature in Revisions of 'The Seasons'", N&Q, CCXI(XIII of the New Series)(December, 1966), 461-64.

of certain parts of nature, but which do not detract from her order as a whole. Others of these revisions indicate a desire to minimize scenes and tones associated with evil and unpleasantness and concentrate on the order and benevolence inherent in nature:

> Ye fostering breezes, blow;
> Ye softening dews, ye tender showers, descend;
> And temper all, thou world-reviving sun,
> Into the perfect year.
> (Spring, ll. 49-52)

> Chief, lovely Spring, in thee and thy soft scenes
> The smiling God is seen—while water, earth,
> And air attest his bounty, which exalts
> The brute-creation to this finer thought,
> And annual melts their undesigning hearts
> Profusely thus in tenderness and joy.[10]
> (Spring, ll. 861-66)

The moralistic passages towards the end of Spring provide further examples of the preoccupation with benevolence and harmony which Shaftesbury's writings inspired. Patricia Meyer Spacks has commented that the "weak" sections of the final version of The Seasons are the result of the poet's increasing preoccupation with "narrow moral concerns".[11] She claims that Thomson neglects to a large degree his original concept of man as an integral part of the great scheme of things. She offers as an example

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[10]See the notes in the J.L. Robertson edition for the original lines; p. 50.

[11]Spacks, op. cit., p. 29.

of Thomson's running counter to his major theme, the passage in Spring cautioning the fair sex in matters of love (ll. 973-982). She implies that these lines are incongruent with the main theme of the poem and thus contribute to disunity. Related to all this (but not mentioned by Spacks) are the lines which first introduce the digression concerning the influence of spring on man:

> Can he forbear to join the general smile
> Of Nature? Can fierce passions vex his breast,
> While every gale is peace, and every grove
> Is melody? Hence! from the bounteous walks
> Of flowing Spring, ye sordid sons of earth,
> Hard, and unfeeling of another's woe,
> Or only lavish to yourselves—away!
> But come, ye generous minds, in whose wide thought,
> Of all his works, Creative Bounty burns
> With warmest beam, and on your open front
> And liberal eye sits, from his dark retreat
> Inviting modest Want.
>
> (ll. 871-882)

The passage above, and the one cautioning the fair sex, follow the long description of love in the animal kingdom. This is a very significant point, since we ought to see them in relation to Spring as a whole. They arise naturally from the descriptions of benevolence and harmony in the natural world. There is nothing about these reflections which is at variance with Thomson's conception of the function of the poet, or his intended design in The Seasons, as outlined in the Preface to the second edition of Winter. In this document he writes

> I know no subject more elevating, more
> amusing; more ready to awake the poetical

> enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment, than the works of Nature.[12]

His contemplation of the works of nature described in Spring have, in the cases above, simply awakened his "moral sentiment". The following segment from the Table of Contents which appeared with the second edition of Spring in 1729 also reveals Thomson's technique:

> This various instinct in brutes ascribed to the continual and unbounded energy of Divine Providence.
>
> Influence of the Spring on man, inspiring a universal benevolence, the love of mankind, and of nature.
>
> Accounted for from that general harmony which then attunes the world.
>
> Effects of the Spring in woman, with a caution to the fair sex.[13]

The point of all this is that Thomson is consistent in his presentation of man-in-nature. It is because the poet views man as part of the overall pattern of nature that he has included the moral reflections mentioned above and placed them in the position they occupy. Thomson's use of the chain of being is important in this respect, as

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[12] I quote from the reprint in J. L. Robertson's Oxford edition of Thomson, pp. 240-41.

[13] Ibid., p. 48.

it is in other places in his work. Here he describes the influence of spring on "inanimate matter, on vegetables, on brute animals, and last on Man;"[14] therefore the transition to the moral reflection is natural.

Shaftesbury's Moralists reflects an interest in practically every feature and mood of nature. He does this in order to show her total harmony; her threatening and seemingly "vengeful" aspects as well as her beneficence.[15] Although he recognizes the presence of what appears to us to be evil, in actuality this is not really evil, but a necessary phenomenon in the total harmony. According to him, nothing is ever lost in the Great Chain of Being; everything moves mysteriously and tirelessly on:

> "THUS in the several Orders of terrestrial
> " Forms, a Resignation is requir'd, a
> " Sacrifice and mutual yielding of Natures
> " one to another. The Vegetables by their
> " Death sustain the Animals: and Animal Bodys
> " dissolv'd, enrich the Earth, and raise again
> " the vegetable World. The numerous Insects are
> " reduc'd by the superior Kinds of Birds and
> " Beasts: and these again are check'd by Man;
> " who in his turn submits to other Natures,
> " and resigns his Form a Sacrifice in common
> " to the rest of Things...."
> (The Moralists, Pt. 1, Section 3,
> Characteristicks, II, 214)

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[14] Ibid., p. [3].

[15] Thomson follows the same procedure. His treatment of scientific and geographical source materials - the accounts of geographers and travellers - serves to enforce what we are saying here. See Chapter IV.

Thomson seems to adopt much the same attitude in Summer. The episode involving Celadon and Amelia provides an example. The poet describes the destruction of the lightning storm among trees and animals. This leads into the human episode which begins with, "And yet not always on the guilty head/ Descends the fated flash." We are given an account of the love of the innocent pair, "till, in evil hour":

> From his void embrace,
> Mysterious Heaven! that moment to the ground,
> A blackened corse, was struck the beauteous maid.
> But who can paint the lover, as he stood
> Pierced by severe amazement, hating life,
> Speechless, and fixed in all the death of woe?
> So, faint resemblance! on the marble tomb
> The well-dissembled mourner stooping stands,
> For ever silent and for ever sad.
> (ll. 1214-22)

In addition to the reason that the story would contribute greatly to the popularity of the poem, Thomson appears to have included such a digression to provide a deliberate juxtaposition to the pleasing aspects of the summer season. Such events are part of the inexorable, inexplicable scheme of things; a part of the intricate, unfolding laws which originated with the Divine Mover. The tale arises naturally out of the description at hand and is terminated without moral commentary. This poetry of human life is presented (in terms of the total structure) more as background to nature, whereas most of Thomson's contemporaries painted nature as a background to human life. We could almost say

that man takes second place here; he is simply like one of the other transient elements in the storm of life. Man is "introduced only as one of the other animals in the scene," writes Stopford Brooke.[16]

The narrative of Palemon and Lavinia (Autumn, ll. 177-310) does not have the same appeal today as it did in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The modern taste cannot brook sentimentalism of this sort. Actually what Thomson is doing is making use of some of the general ideas of Shaftesbury. The story is "a panegyric on Benevolence and Humanity".[17] Palemon, a rich young swain, discovers and immediately falls in love with the poor, though beautiful, daughter of his deceased benefactor, Acasto. Lavinia has been attempting to keep herself and her old mother alive by working as a labourer in Palemon's fields. The latter, overjoyed at his discovery, invites Lavinia to become his wife:

> Here ceased the youth: yet still his speaking eye
> Expressed the sacred triumph of his soul,
> With conscious virtue, gratitude, and love
> Above the vulgar joy divinely raised.
> Nor waited he reply. Won by the charm
> Of goodness irresistible, and all
> In sweet disorder lost, she blushed consent.
> (ll. 294-300)

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[16]Stopford A. Brooke, Naturalism in English Poetry (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1922), p. 48.

[17]John More, Strictures, Critical and Sentimental, on Thomson's Seasons; with Hints and Observations on Collateral Subjects (London, 1777), pp. 47-48; quoted by Ralph Cohen, The Art of Discrimination (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 207.

We ought to remember that these episodes were among the most popular parts of The Seasons for well over a century. In order to understand this fully one has to be able to appreciate the causes of the sentimental movement already mentioned in the first section of this chapter. Another point worthy of mention is that when we consider The Seasons as a whole, we find that these passages of sentimental moralizing are balanced by equally as many rationalistic passages, or lines dealing with the importance of reason and philosophy. But to return to Palemon and Lavinia. Here we have a dramatization of Shaftesburyian benevolence which is relative to the universal benevolence exhibited by the autumnal harvests.[18] Before going so far as to consider this kind of sentiment undesirable in poetry, we must remind ourselves that we can only make a safe interpretation of parts after having determined the kind of poem we are reading. This one is in the tradition of the eighteenth-century descriptive-panegyric poem for the most part; and if the didactic exercise in Shaftesburyian benevolence were not an intricate part of its structure as mentioned above, it would no doubt be injurious to the

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[18] Thomson makes this clear in the Argument to Autumn. He mentions "Reaping" and then follows with "A tale relative to it". A careful consideration of the wording of each of these "Arguments" prefixed to the poems which make up The Seasons, will help to explain many of the passages which, if one is not reading carefully, may appear out of place, incongruent, or to contribute to disunity.

poem's overall effect.

Thomson experiments not only with language and subject matter, but also with the structure of his poem. He combines panorama and panegyric, the universal and particular, and winds up in the tradition of sublime or grand poetry. Shaftesbury's influence is conveyed with discrimination. As in this passage describing destruction in the wake of an autumnal storm, we always sense the emotional factor which exists between nature and man:

> Fled to some eminence, the husbandman
> Helpless beholds the miserable wreck
> Driving along; his drowning ox, at once
> Descending with his labours scattered round,
> He sees; and instant o'er his shivering thought
> Comes winter unprovided, and a train
> Of clamant children dear. Ye masters, then
> Be mindful of the rough laborious hand
> That sinks you soft in elegance and ease;
> Be mindful of those limbs in russet clad
> Whose toil to yours is warmth and graceful pride;
> And oh, be mindful of that sparing board
> Which covers yours with luxury profuse,
> Makes your glass sparkle, and your sense rejoice;
> Nor cruelly demand what the deep rains
> And all-involving winds have swept away!
> (Autumn, ll. 344-59)

In the best descriptive poetry many images lead into some reflection upon moral life. A pathetic reflection properly introduced into such poems has force, beauty, and therefore interest for the reader. In Thomson's lines above, its introduction is natural. The ease with which Thomson moves from description to moral reflection illustrates what D. Nichol Smith means when he writes, "The emotional bearings

of Nature on man are his true theme."[19]

Shaftesbury's concern for the suffering of conscious creatures, animals included, possibly originated with Locke, who implied that animals are not quite as dumb as they have traditionally been made out to be.[20] There are various examples in Thomson of this sympathy and affection for animals. The worn-out stag

> stands at bay,
> And puts his last weak refuge in despair.
> The big round tears run down his dappled face;
> He groans in anguish; while the growling pack,
> Blood-happy, hang at his fair jutting chest,
> And mark his beauteous chequered sides with gore.
> (Autumn, ll. 452-57)

Thomson does not merely imply a moral here. His pictured life of nature - be it of a whole landscape, a particular natural object, or, as in this case, an animal in distress - takes on human attitudes. When this happens again and again we begin to sense the interrelation of man and nature. Poetry consists of vivid images; vivid because coloured by the imagination or copious fancy and infused with sentiment. Consider this picture of the hare:

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[19]David Nichol Smith, Some Observations on Eighteenth Century Poetry (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1937), p. 68.

[20]Kenneth MacLean, John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century (first published in 1936; New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 69.

> Poor is the triumph o'er the timid hare!
> Scared from the corn, and now to some lone seat
> Retired—the rushy fen, the ragged furze
> Stretched o'er the stony heath, the stubble chapped,
> The thistly lawn, the thick entangled broom,
> Of the same friendly hue the withered fern,
> The fallow ground laid open to the sun
> Concoctive, and the nodding sandy bank
> Hung o'er the mazes of the mountain brook.
> Vain is her best precaution; though she sits
> Concealed with folded ears, unsleeping eyes
> By Nature raised to take the horizon in,
> And head couched close betwixt her hairy feet
> In act to spring away.
> (Autumn, ll. 401-14)

This is a brilliant example of Thomson as naturalist poet. He recreates the plenitude of nature in this "the poetry of silence", or the "statuesque".[21] The hare has instinctively blended himself with the natural environment to escape the hunters. Thomson seizes this little poetic idea to show the harmony inherent in the natural order.

The sublimity which we mentioned in connection with Shaftesbury may be seen time and time again in The Seasons. Shaftesbury's interest in the grand effects of nature is related to his philosophy of nature and the universe, but it is an aesthetic view. Thomson, as well, looks on nature with more than a cold, philosophic or scientific eye:

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[21] Cohen, op. cit., p. 274.

> Or, where the Northern Ocean in vast whirls
> Boils round the naked melancholy isles
> Of farthest Thule, and the Atlantic surge
> Pours in among the stormy Hebrides,
> Who can recount what transmigrations there
> Are annual made? What nations come and go?
> And how the living clouds on clouds arise,
> Infinite wings! till all the plume-dark air
> And rude resounding shore are one wild cry?
> (Autumn, ll. 862-70)

The concept of "plastic nature" is as old as the Cambridge Platonists, Cudworth in particular.[22] Shaftesbury based many of his ideas on the Platonists. It is exactly this plastic nature that we have described for us above. Thomson achieves sublimity by combining several techniques: The huge flocks of birds become rising clouds which darken the air; the one word, "nations", relates the scene to the human order; the tremendous ringing in the air, caused by the birds, becomes one with the noise of the "rude resounding shore". The overall effect of this is to emphasize the world's beauty and harmony and the relation of its parts one to another. The scene is, of course, an account of the annual migration of the birds, and is illustrative of our poet's interest in the cyclic pattern. Also contributing to sublimity are the carefully chosen words: "vast", "Boils", "naked melancholy", "stormy", "Infinite", "wild", and the use of rhetorical questions.

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[22] Moore, op. cit., p. 258.

As shown by some of the quotations from Shaftesbury included in the first part of this chapter, there are sections of his writings which anticipate the mood of Wordsworth; the religious pleasure or melancholy which certain kinds of scenery arouse in the observer.[23] Thomson sometimes evokes similar feelings:

> Oh! bear me then to vast embowering shades,
> To twilight groves, and visionary vales,
> To weeping grottoes, and prophetic glooms;
> Where angel forms athwart the solemn dusk,
> Tremendous, sweep, or seem to sweep along;
> And voices more than human, through the void
> Deep-sounding, seize the enthusiastic ear.
> (Autumn, ll. 1030-36)

Three elements inevitably enter into all kinds of poetry (at least that which is truly worthy of the name "poetry"), although in varying degrees: Man, Nature, and God (or some form of the supernatural; that which is beyond the human).[24] All three of these are in evidence, either directly or indirectly, in the lines just quoted. It is likely that in this instance Thomson is recollecting the emotions the Scottish scenery aroused in him as a boy. Thus not only do we have a picture of one of the many faces of nature, but, in addition, a vivid impression of the emotion it has stirred in man (the poet). Furthermore this impression

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[23] Moore, op. cit., pp. 262-63.

[24] John Campbell Shairp, On Poetic Interpretation of Nature (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1877), p. 12.

is successfully transferred to the reader. The third element mentioned is present in the form of "visionary vales", "angel forms", and "voices more than human". Here nature is viewed through a kind of glory.

Winter, first published in March, 1726, consisted of only 405 lines in the original. As a result of successive revisions and additions between that time and 1746, its final form consisted of 1069 lines. It was the first season to be published. The original poem is particularly interesting from the standpoint of Thomson's deism, but there are also other influences of Shaftesbury:

> The Year, yet pleasing, but declining fast,
> Soft, o'er the secret Soul, in gentle Gales,
> A Philosophic Melancholly breathes,
> And bears the swelling Thought aloft to Heaven.
> Then forming Fancy rouses to conceive,
> What never mingled with the Vulgar's Dream:
> Then wake the tender Pang, the pitying Tear,
> The Sigh for suffering Worth, the Wish prefer'd
> For Humankind, the Joy to see them bless'd,
> And all the Social Off-spring of the Heart!
> (ll. 64-73)

As is the case with other parts of The Seasons, we ought to interpret such passages in light of their context in the poem, and using Thomson's statements in the preface as a guide. When we do this we see that Thomson relates man, or the moral order, to the order of nature. The lines on benevolence above are inspired by the mood of the declining year, the decay of nature. They follow a description of the woods in late autumn in which the falling leaves,

fruit, and other indications of the dying year induce a state of "Philosophic Melancholly". It is this state of mind which transports the poet's soul "aloft to Heaven", arouses him to noble sentiments, and wakes the social affections. Thomson relates the moral order and the order of nature in other ways as well. The four lines immediately preceding the passage quoted above contain the following personification:

> The falling Fruits,
> Thro' the still Night, forsake the Parent-Bough,
> That, in the first, grey, Glances of the Dawn,
> Looks wild, and wonders at the wintry Waste.
> (ll. 60-63)

Line 74 immediately following the main passage quoted says, "Oh! bear me then to high, embowering, Shades;" which indicates a desire to become enclosed in nature. Thus the expression of man's obligation to benevolence is handled in such a way as to make man appear to be very much a part of the natural order.

In The Moralists Shaftesbury makes it clear that the whole creation, the complete map of nature, is worthy of man's admiration. In addition to descriptions of the beauty and horror of mountains and winter storms, Thomson, following the method of Shaftesbury, conducts us on a tour of the frigid zone in Winter. As already mentioned, Shaftesbury does not believe in the ultimate existence of evil. Essentially his philosophy is an

optimistic one. Everything in the universe contributes towards total harmony, and the world is one of perfect order and government reflecting the universal benevolence of God. Thomson presents a balanced view of nature and human life. Some of his best poetry deals with the problem of fate - mystery, danger, human suffering, and wickedness - which provides the necessary conflict with virtue and universal benevolence in order to bring about a greater harmony. His view of evil appears to be the same as Shaftesbury's. He is optimistic, but he does not deny the experience of evil. Indeed, because of this he continually encourages development of virtue, the moral sense:

> Father of light and life! thou Good Supreme!
> O teach me what is good! teach me Thyself!
> Save me from folly, vanity, and vice,
> From every low pursuit; and feed my soul
> With knowledge, conscious peace, and virtue pure—
> Sacred, substantial, never-fading bliss!
> (1746 edition of Winter, ll. 217-22)

The poet has been led into deep contemplation by the silence and midnight gloom following a storm - his usual technique of introducing a moralistic reflection. It ought to be obvious by now that it is this moral beauty, or universal benevolence, which acts as an important unifying force in Thomson's major poems, especially The Seasons. Thomson's ideas are similar to Shaftesbury's, but whereas the latter condemned the orthodox notion of

future reward and punishment, Thomson simply does not mention any such thing in The Seasons. C. A. Moore writes, "...Thomson makes no attempt to enforce morality by reference to a future life."[25] He does say at the end of Winter that there is bliss and greater knowledge in store for the virtuous at the end of life, but this follows naturally from the life of virtue, and is not indicated in any way by Thomson to be related to the orthodox notion. One must not be obliged to exercise the social duties because of what might happen at the Judgement Day, but because such actions are natural to man, and the only method by which he can obtain true happiness.

Generally speaking Thomson is optimistic and has much to say concerning the beauty and benevolence of God inherent in the works of creation. On the other hand, he is keenly aware of the problem of fate; man's life in relation to the overwhelming forces of nature:

> Alas!
> Nor wife nor children more shall he behold,
> Nor friends, nor sacred home. On every nerve
> The deadly Winter seizes, shuts up sense,
> And, o'er his inmost vitals creeping cold,
> Lays him along the snows a stiffened corse,
> Stretched out, and bleaching in the northern blast.
> (Winter, ll. 315-21)

In his better passages such as this one Thomson manages

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[25]Cecil Moore, "Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets in England, 1700-1760", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America [hereafter cited as PMLA], XXXI (1916), 287.

to avoid the excessively rhetorical and latinized style for which he has been given a hard time by critics. There is no indication of his strong tendency to employ adjectives as adverbs, and adjectives as verbs, or of his sometimes tiresome use of compounds. Thomson's dependence on Milton occasionally results in a discrepancy between style and conception.[26] Here the style is clean of anything which could be labelled "turgid", "florid", or "luxuriant", yet we sense Thomson's regard for nature (and her relation to mankind generally) as a theme of almost epical grandeur. A favorite rhythmical effect of Thomson's comes at the end of a passage mainly, and, although it is very good, tends to become tiresome after repeated use:

> And Mecca saddens at the long delay.
>
> It boils, and wheels, and foams, and thunders through.

The pathos evoked by "saddens" and "long delay", and the vigorous quality of "boils", "wheels", "foams", and "thunders", are typical of how Thomson's iambic pentameters tend to suggest this theme of epical grandeur. In the passage from Winter quoted above, "Stretched out, and bleaching in the northern blast" is an appropriate use of the technique because of the nature of the scene he is describing. This picture of the man perishing in the storm is another example of Thomson's creation of the "statuesque". These scenes always

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[26] See Raymond Dexter Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (first published in 1922; New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), pp. 138-39.

involve terms like "froze", "marbled", or, as in this case, "stiffened". They reveal a situation of shock and irony - the indifference of nature - and imply the basically pathetic position of man. Joseph Warton writes, "The judicious addition of circumstances and adjuncts, is what renders poesy a more lively imitation of nature than prose."[27] Thomson shows his awareness of this. Like Thomas Gray and others, he draws on a passage from Lucretius.[28] In the midst of his description of the man lying still in the snow he inserts the following:

> In vain his little children, peeping out
> Into the mingling storm, demand their sire
> With tears of artless innocence.
> (Winter, ll. 313-15)

Alexander Anderson (1775-1870), the American engraver, has engraved The Seasons more times than any other artist, according to Ralph Cohen. Anderson tends to emphasize the sense of "loneliness and desperation of man's condition."[29] Man is made to appear dwarfed in comparison to the great tasks facing him, or in face of the vastness

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[27] Joseph Warton, An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope (Pt. I, 1756; Pt. II, 1782) (5th ed., London, 1806), I, ll.

[28] See Lucretius, On the Nature of the Universe [De Rerum Natura], trans. and with an introduction by R. E. Latham (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1951), Bk. III, p. 123. Also Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard, ll. 21-24 in The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray, ed. H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 38.

[29] Cohen, op. cit., p. 286.

of nature. This interpretation, possibly, to a large extent reveals Thomson's intention. Like Shaftesbury's, the poet's view is an optimistic one, but he is also realistic, or naturalistic. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century The Seasons is interpreted mainly as an unsentimental poem by the illustrator-critics. This is partly due to the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite doctrine of realism, but, in any case, man in Thomson is treated as an object of nature.[30] Illustrations of the Celadon and Amelia episode, for example, attempt most of all to show the realistic expression of the man's face - its desperation. Such an interpretation, even if not completely accurate with respect to the poet's intention, is interesting, since it supports what has been said about Thomson's view of the relationship between man and nature. Man is seen not as an insignificant, but as an organic part of his environment.

Shaftesbury regards the so-called "ugly" in nature, events of destruction wrought by storms and the plague, and the death of the innocent, as necessary and inevitable in the harmonious scheme of things. These are themes which a philosopher attempts to answer explicitly and systematically. Thomson, as poet, merely utilizes Shaftesbury's

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[30]Cohen, op. cit., pp. 303-4.

ideas of nature and fate to express a general attitude towards life. His poetic mode of dealing with questions which poets have always dealt with - those of fate, nature, and man - involves partly (in The Seasons at least) the technique of contrasting images and situations, a language showing the changing faces and moods of nature, and the sublime.

The description of the man dying in the snowstorm leads into the following lines reflecting the influence of Shaftesbury:

> Thought fond man
> Of these, and all the thousand nameless ills
> That one incessant struggle render life,
> One scene of toil, of suffering, and of fate,
> Vice in his high career would stand appalled,
> And heedless rambling Impulse learn to think;
> The conscious heart of Charity would warm,
> And her wide wish Benevolence dilate;
> The social tear would rise, the social sigh;
> And, into clear perfection, gradual bliss,
> Refining still, the social passions work.
> (Winter, ll. 348-58)

If we recall what was said in the first section of this chapter, in Shaftesbury's theory of morals the virtuous personality is one which reflects the harmony and order of physical nature. His theory of morals and his aesthetic theory are interrelated, virtue and beauty being one and the same. The man of benevolence, of virtue, is the truly happy man. This is indicated above, in addition to the fact that the elements of one's personality should be

well-balanced and harmonious.[31] Shaftesbury's truly natural man is one who has progressed by reason. Thomson indicates as much when he says, "And heedless rambling Impulse learn to think".

There are at least two more passages in The Seasons which deserve to be quoted almost fully in order to show Thomson's reliance on Shaftesbury, and because each is a fine poetic treatment of the analogy between moral order and the harmony and order of the outside, physical world. The first is the conclusion of the final edition of Winter; the second ends A Hymn On The Seasons (1746 edition; the poem was first published in 1730):

> Virtue sole survives—
> Immortal, never-failing friend of man,
> His guide to happiness on high. And see!
> 'Tis come, the glorious morn! the second birth
> Of heaven and earth! awakening nature hears
> The new-creating word, and starts to life
> In every heightened form, from pain and death
> For ever free. The great eternal scheme,
> Involving all, and in a perfect whole
> Uniting, as the prospect wider spreads,
> To reason's eye refined clears up apace.
> .....
> Ye good distressed!
> Ye noble few! who here unbending stand
> Beneath life's pressure, yet bear up awhile,
> And what your bounded view, which only saw
> A little part, deemed evil is no more:
> The storms of wintry time will quickly pass,
> And one unbounded Spring encircle all.
> (ll. 1039-49, and 1063-69)

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[31] See also the Argument to Spring "concluding with a dissuasive from the wild and irregular passion of Love, opposed to that of a pure and happy kind", in the J. L. Robertson edition, p. [3].

> I cannot go
> Where universal love not smiles around,
> Sustaining all yon orbs and all their sons;
> From seeming evil still educing good,
> And better thence again, and better still,
> In infinite progression. But I lose
> Myself in him, in light ineffable!
> Come then, expressive Silence, muse his praise.
> (ll. 111-18)

Here we have a summary of practically all that has been said in previous pages concerning Shaftesbury's influence on Thomson. In the first passage there is the association of virtue and happiness; a reference to the harmony of the "great eternal scheme"; Shaftesbury's explanation of evil; and Thomson's theory of an infinite progression of knowledge. Thomson's mention of evil in both quotations above is consistent with what has been said on this subject earlier. The phrase "universal love" in the lines from the Hymn refers to the idea of social love or benevolence. The notions here are for the most part repetitions of those in the first passage, except that the Hymn is in more of a religious vein. God is associated with "light ineffable", an interesting fact, since light, and the power and position of the sun, are of considerable importance in the theme and imagery of The Seasons. The most noticeable thing about those two passages is their optimism, a characteristic mood in the works of Shaftesbury and Thomson. As shown in previous pages, Thomson sees fit to include this moralistic commentary as a necessary part of his descriptive-contemplative poem. He does this in

such a way as to make it reinforce his main emphasis on natural order and man-in-nature. The concluding lines of Winter above constitute his most successful attempt in this connection. He begins the whole passage (ll. 1024-69) with an analogy between the cycle of the seasons and the cycle of human life. By mid-passage the emphasis is on the human aspect, but the final two lines tie both sides of the analogy together again:

> The storms of wintry time will quickly pass,
> And one unbounded Spring encircle all.

Thus the human, and the forces of external nature become fused.

When Thomson portrays man in integral relation to nature, the poetry has greater force. Man and natural objects are viewed almost as one and the same in the natural order in this description of a storm:

> The dark wayfaring stranger breathless toils,
> And, often falling, climbs against the blast.
> Low waves the rooted forest, vexed, and sheds
> What of its tarnished honours yet remain—
> Dashed down and scattered, by the tearing wind's
> Assiduous fury, its gigantic limbs.
> (Winter, ll. 179-84)

When the poet is relating man to nature, he frequently resorts to personification to achieve the desired effect. Furthermore, he occasionally portrays man exercising his responsibilities: in the face of the storm he feeds the sheep and arranges their shelter (Winter, ll. 261-67); he feeds the birds (Winter, ll. 245-56). Man is seen as a

part of nature, and thus he has an obligation to fulfil his function as part of the Great Chain of Being. Ultimately he is of little significance (like the animals) in the face of the overwhelming cosmos. When he carries out his duty in relation to the other "orders" within the Chain, he is part of the total harmony of divine creation. All this is not merely theoretical in Thomson's view. Our poet is a realist. While recognizing the beauty and rationality of the divinely ordered scheme, he is easily moved emotionally by the tragedy inherent in human existence. Thus Thomson's aesthetic appreciation of all aspects of nature involves a combination of emotion and intellect.

There are two important matters which ought to be mentioned in connection with the poetry quoted in the preceding pages. Discussing the Miltonic aspects of The Seasons, Patricia Meyer Spacks says that it resembles the poetry of Milton in that it shows the poet to have had a high conception of his subject. Although the two works are not in exactly the same theological vein, both Paradise Lost and The Seasons are in a similar tradition, a "genre of high seriousness."[32] Milton, because of the nature of his subject (it is outside human jurisdiction), employs a kind of vagueness in his description to suggest this

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[32] Spacks, op. cit., p. 188.

very quality of superhuman grandeur. That such a technique does not always succeed in Thomson's poem is easily explained when we consider his subject in relation to Milton's. There are times, nevertheless, when the grand style is applicable, when language and conception coincide (as in most of the passages quoted), and this contributes much to the poetic quality of The Seasons.

Thomson's poetic technique reflects two of the main elements of Shaftesbury's contribution to aesthetics and literary criticism:

> All nature should be an object of contemplation and all its features a source of aesthetic delight.[33]

> Furthermore, if art were to be an imitation of nature, it could not just be the mechanical copying of natural phenomena, but had to be an imitation of the whole creative process going on in nature.[34]

There is a tendency to think of Thomson as a descriptive poet in the usual sense, but this is not strictly true. He is no mere word-painter continuing page after page to give us delightful pictures of the external world. Although he often employs the technique of "sculpture" in his work, more often than not he shows us the life and movement, the flux of nature. We see it not as it is in actuality, but as seen through his poetic eye.

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[33] Brett, op. cit., p. 73.

[34] Brett, op. cit., p. 67.

The vivid contrast of light and shade; the sudden insertion of sculpture in the midst of action; the rapid movement of scenes of night and day, summer and winter, spring and autumn, storm and calm, the beautiful and the grotesque; all of this taken together is what has led one critic to refer to Thomson as a "dramatist of the forces of Nature."[35] It is because of the life and action which he infuses into the landscape that Thomson makes genuine poetry out of a subject which was often thought inappropriate for a long poem. There is continual movement and change - the departure and return of birds; the death and birth of vegetation; the death of man at the hands of nature; and also the inspiration and breath of life he receives from her in her most benevolent moods. We see nature in all her minuteness and in her vastness. There is the drama of nature and human drama. Thomson is at his best when the human drama is viewed as an integral part of the greater drama of nature.[36]

There appear to be four themes arising out of The Seasons.

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[35] Sir George Douglas, Scottish Poetry (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1911), p. 60.

[36] We shall see this even more - in addition to greater evidence of Thomson as the poet of nature's creative processes - in the chapter dealing with his use of science and travel literature.

(1) All aspects of nature are beautiful in their own peculiar way, serve a particular function, and are worthy of our observation and admiration.

(2) The various faces and moods of nature arouse us to philosophical contemplation and moral reflection.

(3) Nature, indeed the whole cosmos, including man, is a perfect, harmonious, divinely-ordered phenomenon.

(4) There is a Creator whose power, spirit, and benevolence are evidenced in nature. With this God or Spirit everything must have originated, and by his laws, physical and moral, everything continues.

In line with these themes, the material of The Seasons consists of descriptions of external nature (most of the poem is taken up with this); moral and philosophical reflection interwoven with these descriptions; an all-pervading emphasis on harmony, the cyclical pattern (involving also personification to show how man fits into the scheme, in addition to scenes of death and destruction); and finally there is the deistical element.

But to return to Shaftesbury. Since those themes mentioned above comprise a considerable part of Shaftesbury's philosophy, Thomson draws on the philosopher to enforce them, to provide complexity and coherence in realizing his final form for the poem. Let us consider this group of themes around which the poem is built as the "problem" or

"reason" behind it, and which determines its final form.[37] All parts of the poem may be explained in terms of one, or a combination of these themes. In the following chapter we shall deal with deism (the fourth theme mentioned), and other religious ideas, as shown in The Seasons and other poems.

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[37] See R. S. Crane, The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953), pp. 165-67.

CHAPTER III:

THE UNIVERSAL SOUL

Hail, Source of Being! Universal Soul
Of Heaven and Earth! Essential Presence, hail!
To thee I bend the knee; to thee my thoughts
Continual climb, who with a master-hand
Hast the great whole into perfection touched.

Spring, ll. 556-560

It is impossible to overlook the religious train of thought in Thomson's poetry. Judging from his concern with this theme in the Preface to the second edition of Winter, it is evident that he intends his poem to be part of the tradition of "sacred poetry" which includes the Psalms, the Book of Job, and Paradise Lost. Despite this, an explication of his religious philosophy as such is by no means Thomson's motive. His foremost purpose is aesthetic-artistic. A poet must have some reasonably consistent idea of a cosmos upon which to centre the material of his poetry. For Homer it involves the mythical gods and their relationship with man and his surroundings. In the Renaissance the great poets make use of Platonism, the concept of the Great Chain, and the related notion of Correspondences. Hence it is only natural for Thomson to make use of various contemporary theories of the universe, of religion and ethics, as a basis for his poetic depiction of man, nature, and God. Fairchild has accurately described the reason for Thomson's occasionally inconsistent philosophy:

> His philosophy is interesting precisely because it is not a cool a priori fabrication, but a genuine outgrowth of his temperament. . . . It would be hard to find a poet whose ideas are more organically related to his art.[1]

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[1] Hoxie N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (in two volumes, New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), I, 516.

Thomson thinks in much the same way as many of the men of his age, but he turns most of what he reads and hears into something original. His religious ideas are an integral part of his poetics. Thomson's religion in his poetry is mainly deism, but there are signs of pantheism, and it is not difficult to make a case for the presence of orthodox Christianity. Finally, there appears to be a slight interest in Pythagorean doctrine. It is my opinion that orthodox Christianity is of more importance as background in Thomson's work than has generally been recognized. Psalm 148, the Book of Job, and Book V of Paradise Lost contain exhortations to all created things to praise God because of the majesty and divine power manifested in his works. The Hymn (1730), which crowns Thomson's achievement in The Seasons and is meant to be read in direct connection with it, is partly a paraphrase of Psalm 148. Anyone who has read Paradise Lost and The Seasons cannot fail to see the similarities of language and, in some instances, of subject matter.[2]

Thomson's father was a narrow Presbyterian minister in the tradition of rigid Calvinism. James went to the University of Edinburgh to study theology in 1715 and the same Calvinistic influence was prevalent throughout this city and university, although the new spirit of liberalism

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[2] See Havens, op. cit., chapter VI.

and rationalism was rapidly gaining influence at the time Thomson began his studies. Newtonian science was becoming well-established at Edinburgh. Even before he left Scotland (1725) Thomson "had already learned to regard the physical universe and its laws in a religious light."[3] But an early work such as A Complaint on the Miseries of Life exhibits a strictly Calvinistic theology:

> Fitly this life's compared to night,
> When gloomy darkness shades the sky;
> Just like the morn's our glimmering light
> Reflected from the Deity.
> When will celestial morn dispel
> These dark surrounding shades of hell?
> (ll. 7-12)

A few more examples will serve to show the general theme of these early attempts:

> To him they[the birds] sing when Spring renews the plain
> To him they cry in Winter's pinching reign;
> Nor is their music, nor their plaint in vain
> He hears the gay and the distressful call,
> And with unsparing bounty fills them all.
> (A Paraphrase of the latter part of the sixth chapter of St. Matthew, ll. 21-25)

> Then hither come, climb up the steep ascent,
> Your painful labour you will n'er repent,
> From Heaven itself here you're but one remove,
> Here's the praeludium of the joys above,
> Here you'll behold the awful Godhead shine,
> And all perfections in the same combine;
> You'll see that God, who, by his powerful call,
> From empty nothing drew this spacious all,
> Made beauteous order the rude mass control,
> And every part subservient to the whole;
> Here you'll behold upon the fatal tree
> The God of nature bleed, expire, and die,
> For such as 'gainst his holy laws rebel,

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[3] Fairchild, op. cit., p. 511.

> And such as bid defiance to his hell.
> Through the dark gulf, here you may clearly pry
> 'Twixt narrow time and vast eternity;
> Behold the Godhead, just as well as good,
> And vengeance poured on tramplers on his blood;
> But all the tears wiped from his people's eyes;
> And, for their entrance, cleave the parting skies.
> (Upon Happiness, ll. 102-21)

With the exception of the poem from which the first quotation is taken, the other early poems deal with a god which could just as easily be the god of nature mentioned so often in Thomson's later poetry. The lines from Upon Happiness contain a mixture of traditional Christian thought and the rationalism coming in vogue. Thus even as early as 1720 Thomson's poetry shows no sign of a consistent, easily-defined, theology. Later the various strands of thought become even more complicated, but they all contribute towards a particular end, an end which reveals a close connection between Thomson's theology and his poetry. This "end" will help us understand the relationship that exists between his philosophy, science, religion, and theory of progress.

Although he has his own special brand, Thomson is in general agreement with the deism of his day. Deism, or "natural religion", is

> the belief in a Supreme Being as the source of finite existence, with rejection of revelation and the supernatural doctrines of Christianity.[4]

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[4] "Deism", The Oxford Companion to English Literature, ed. Paul Harvey (first published in 1932; 4th ed., Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 225.

For the eighteenth-century deists "natural" means that which is agreeable or suited to the mind of an abstract man, "the man of parts and sense,. . . the moral norm of the age."[5] The way in which man is viewed with respect to religion undergoes a great change at this time. The old idea of man as a degenerate, fallen creature struggling against a fallen nature (as a totally guilty and miserable sinner, the old conception before Bacon, Newton, and Shaftesbury rehabilitated nature) is fast disappearing. Nature becomes more of a liberating principle by the beginning of the eighteenth century. This change gives rise to more emphasis on the Rights of Nature, and, in turn, the Rights of Man. In the religious sphere, deism corresponds to the new movement in philosophy and politics. Natural religion is more optimistic; it is more in tune with the new Age of Enlightenment. Orthodox or organized religion tends to be blamed for originating the notions of man's tragic sense of sin and the angry and offended God. Most of this is thought to have originated in the Middle Ages, and there is little that is more rejected in the eighteenth century than the Middle Ages. It is for these reasons that Shaftesbury attacks traditional religious notions and

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[5] Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (first published in 1940; London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 10.

attitudes:

> IF, as in the first Case, there be a Belief or Conception of a DEITY, who is consider'd only as powerful over his Creature, and inforcing Obedience to his absolute Will by particular Rewards and Punishments; and if on this account, thro' hope merely of Reward, or fear of Punishment, the Creature be incited to do the Good he hates, or restrain'd from doing the Ill to which he is not otherwise in the least degree averse; there is in this Case (as has been already shewn) no Virtue or Goodness whatsoever.
>
> (An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit, Book I, Pt. 3, Section 3, Characteristicks, II, 55.)

The Supreme Being, and Universal Soul, become popular terms for the deity, and in the new view he is thought of as being much more benevolent. The new religion involves Reason rather than Enthusiasm (fanatical adherence to the supernatural); but this does not necessarily mean that there is any deprecation of feeling and emotion in the religion of Shaftesbury, who appears to have had the greatest influence on Thomson in this respect.

It has been suggested by at least one critic that Thomson's religious ideas may be directly related to Newtonianism.[6] This involves an appeal to the existence of world-order to prove the existence of God, his love, glory, and sublimity. Although such a suggestion does not appear at first to make a great deal of difference, it

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[6] Herbert Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry", Englische Studien [hereafter cited as E. Studien], LXX (1936), 363-72.

does place Thomson in another light, since, ostensibly at least, Newton and his school remained in the orthodox tradition. What I mean is that Newton and his school, until labelled as "materialists" and "mechanists" much later, were generally regarded as being in the orthodox tradition; whereas Shaftesbury was early recognized as a deist.

The deists as a distinct body originated early in the seventeenth century. They professed a belief in a personal God and rejected the authority of Revelation. The earliest of the English deists was Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1588-1648). He believed in one Supreme God who is to be worshipped, and this worship should consist of piety and virtue. We must repent of our sins and, depending on this condition, there are rewards or punishments in a future state.[7] The difference between Lord Herbert and later deists like Shaftesbury was that the former displayed little if any antagonism towards Christianity. There are elements of this antagonism in Shaftesbury, but this is by no means his main concern. The latter may be said to be his preoccupation with the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God, in addition to the vastness, beauty, and harmony of creation.

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[7] W. J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry (first published 1895-1905; in five volumes, London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1919-25), V, 275.

Thomson, likewise, deals with the principles of natural religion. He attempts to investigate and delineate the order of external nature in such a way as to reveal the mind of God in it:

> Hail, Source of Being! Universal Soul
> Of heaven and earth! Essential Presence, hail!
> To thee I bend the knee; to thee my thoughts
> Continual climb, who with a master-hand
> Hast the great whole into perfection touched.
> (Spring, ll. 556-60)

The titles "Source of Being", "Universal Soul", and "Essential Presence" indicate the deistic meaning in these lines. But what we ought to note here is not just the fact that "Source", "Universal", and "Essential" stress the omnipotence and omnipresence of the deity, but the presence of three other factors as well: (1) the idea that his thoughts "continual climb" (which is part of the process of soul development, or comprehensive theory of progress, evident throughout all his poetry); (2) the mention of harmony inherent in creation, its "perfection"; and (3) the phrase "great whole", which shows the poet's concern with vastness.

The notion of the sublime is of the utmost significance in Thomson's poetry and forms part of his theology. He does not appear to be especially concerned whether or not God is the God of revealed religion as conceived in Christian doctrine, the God of the deists, or whether God is Nature (the pantheistic view). What he

is concerned with is that there is a God who has all the attributes mentioned in the preceding paragraph, and that he deserves to be praised for creating a universe of such variety, beauty, and vastness. The Seasons includes mainly descriptions of variety, beauty, and vastness, and it is this which prompts the poet to launch into frequent addresses like the one quoted above. He has been describing a broad landscape which includes a river, lake, several hills and valleys, multitudes of flowers, and concludes that "expression cannot paint" this "endless bloom". Thus it is his concern with the infinite, the vast, the awe-inspiring which leads the poet immediately into the above address to the Deity.

There is further evidence of this relationship between sublimity and theology in Spring:

> What is this mighty breath, ye curious, say,
> That in a powerful language, felt, not heard,
> Instructs the fowls of heaven, and through their
> breast
> These arts of love diffuses? What, but God?
> Inspiring God! who, boundless spirit all
> And unremitting energy, pervades,
> Adjusts, sustains, and agitates the whole.
> He ceaseless works alone, and yet alone
> Seems not to work; with such perfection framed
> Is this complex, stupendous scheme of things.
> (ll. 849-58)

Thomson is not content to merely describe the birds as mating; he sees them as practising the art of love. This practice is the counterpart of that in the human order (which he mentions immediately following), an example of

the mystery and harmony in the "stupendous scheme of things." It is this mysterious element, of course, which interests the poet and is the direct cause of his ecstatic outburst in praise of the Deity. The influence of Shaftesbury reflected in the passage is familiar by now. The spirit of God activates nature as the soul activates the body. Thomson appears to have adopted the language of the deists as the most convenient vehicle with which to voice his praise. This is what he does in most cases, but, as I hope to demonstrate shortly, he draws also on the Book of Job and the Psalms. The theme and language of these two poems are, in certain sections, not so very much different from deism. Words and phrases like "mighty", "powerful", "boundless spirit", "unremitting energy", "complex stupendous scheme", in the quotation above, are typical of the poetical myth created by Thomson, of which his theology forms a considerable part.

There is another passage in Spring which combines Shaftesburyian optimism and love of nature with the notion of soul-development:

> By swift degrees the love of nature works,
> And warms the bosom; till at last, sublimed
> To rapture and enthusiastic heat,
> We feel the present Deity, and taste
> The joy of God to see a happy world!
> (ll. 899-903)

It is obviously Shaftesbury's deity that is referred to here. Thomson's theory of spiritual evolution has already

been mentioned. This notion is implied once again above, and we shall see further evidence of it in Summer, Winter, and the Hymn. It is a theory of increasing virtue and knowledge and seems to over-lap in his ethics, theology, and political and social theory.

Thomson's theory combines too many sources to be in any sense consistent. It involves Platonism, the Great Chain of Being, Bacon's scale of knowledge, and a very slight interest in Pythagorean doctrine (see Liberty, Pt. III, ll. 63-70). Take these lines from Summer:

> The great deliverer he, who, from the gloom
> Of cloistered monks and jargon-teaching schools,
> Led forth the true philosophy, there long
> Held in the magic chain of words and forms
> And definitions void: he led her forth,
> Daughter of Heaven! that, slow-ascending still,
> Investigating sure the chain of things,
> With radiant finger points to Heaven again.
> (ll. 1543-1550)

Here Thomson is referring to Bacon and his theory. The Great Chain of Being may be interpreted in such a manner as to allow for progress, and there is an indication of this in the lines above.[8] Man is immortal, and he may pass

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[8]Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (first published in 1936; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 246. A very brief summary of Pythagoreanism is perhaps necessary here. About 529 B.C. Pythagoras was driven from his home in Samos to Crotona in southern Italy by the tyranny of Polycrates. He soon became quite active and gave his name to an order of scientific and religious thinkers, an association for the moral reformation of society. He taught the transmigration of the soul from one body to another, even of a different species (the "wheel of life"). On the other hand, the soul of a man who led a pure life might eventually be released from all flesh and achieve immortality. Pythagoras also anticipated Copernicus. Although he dismisses the "wheel of life" in favour of an ascending chain, Thomson is obviously attracted by Pythagoras' ideas on liberty, the system of the universe, brotherhood, and immortality.

from early stages of knowledge on to other and higher levels into infinity. "This progress is at once ethical, religious, and scientific."[9] Our knowledge keeps on increasing with the use of our reason, until in the future life, we shall obtain the advantage of a better understanding of the workings of the universe.[10]

A good example of the sort of thing which tends to confuse the reader in his attempt to reconstruct Thomson's religious conceptions is the following:

> The vegetable world is also thine,
> Parent of Seasons! who the pomp precede
> That waits thy throne, as through thy vast domain,
> Annual, along the bright ecliptic road
> In world-rejoicing state it moves sublime.
> Meantime the expecting nations, circled gay
> With all the various tribes of foodful earth,
> Implore thy bounty, or send grateful up
> A common hymn:...
> (Summer, ll. 112-20)

This represents the sun almost as God in itself and verges on pantheism. Later he addresses the sun as a "delegated Source" (deism):

> But this,
> And all the much-transported Muse can sing,
> Are to thy beauty, dignity, and use
> Unequal far, great delegated Source
> Of light and life and grace and joy below!
> (Summer, ll. 170-4)

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[9] Alan D. McKillop, The Background of Thomson's 'Seasons' (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1942), p. 22.

[10] See a letter to Dr. William Cranstoun, Oct. 20, 1735, quoted by Grant, op. cit., pp. 151-52.

Then immediately following this we have:

> How shall I then attempt to sing of Him
> Who, Light Himself, in uncreated light
> Invested deep, dwells awfully retired
> From mortal eye or angel's purer ken;
> Whose single smile has, from the first of time,
> Filled overflowing all those lamps of heaven
> That beam for ever through the boundless sky:
> (Summer, ll. 175-81)

which appears to refer to the traditional God of Christianity. Viewed out of context such passages do tend to show a slightly confused conception of the Deity. But this "confusion", if we allow ourselves to use this word, does not stem so much from the poet's vision as from his poetical enthusiasm. Thomson, like most poets of the early eighteenth century, resorts all too frequently to personified abstractions. What we have to consider in this case is not so much theologically accurate statement as the poet's use of figurative language. Throughout the whole of this first part of Summer, Thomson addresses the sun; and if in addition to the lines quoted we note various qualifying phrases, the confusion is greatly reduced:

> Prime cheerer, Light!
> Of all material beings first and best!
> (Summer, ll. 90-1)

> and thou, O Sun!
> Soul of surrounding worlds! in whom best seen
> Shines out thy Maker!
> (Summer, ll. 94-6)

Thus the possibility of a pantheistic vision is greatly reduced.

There is little difference between Thomson's

poetical and his religious enthusiasm. This fact has certain stylistic implications. Sometimes Thomson's imitation of the Miltonic style is inappropriate for his subject, but Milton's Latinate style came naturally to the Scottish poets of the day.[11] Thomson's vagueness of description, his adoption of the "genre of high seriousness" in these religious passages, is in keeping with the thought they aim to express. The Miltonic quality of superhuman grandeur is, in this case, put to good use, since Thomson's intention does not differ greatly from Milton's. The latter attempts to justify the ways of God to man; Thomson's purpose is to describe and explain the vastness and beauties of creation (while at the same time, in the poetic sense, "make it strange"), and praise the power and benevolence of its Author. Here is an adequate summary of Thomson's style by an unknown writer, which may be applied especially to his religious passages:

> His style is indeed learned and ornate. But Burke has shown that words may the most powerfully affect the mind when their meaning is indefinite. Where Thomson's language is the most inflated, his expressions have generally a specious grandeur of meaning derived from the felicity with which they are selected.[12]

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[11] Nichol Smith, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

[12] Quoted by McKillop, op. cit., p. 6, from an edition of The Seasons published by John Sharpe (1816), pp. ix-x.

Throughout the passages discussed the optimistic quality of Shaftesbury's deism is ever present. There is further example of the concept of the sublime in Thomson's expression of his religious views. He makes use of phrases such as "thy vast domain", "moves sublime", "dwells awfully retired", and "boundless sky".

In Winter the story is similar. On the whole, Thomson's religious views do not appear to be part of the conflict over rational and revealed religion (mainly over and done with by the time Thomson was writing), nor are they fully characteristic of eighteenth-century deism as such. It is still possible to find passages verging on pantheism:

> Nature! great parent! whose unceasing hand
> Rolls round the Seasons of the changeful year,
> How mighty, how majestic are thy works!
> With what a pleasing dread they swell the soul,
> That sees astonished, and astonished sings!
> (ll. 106-10)

There appears to be little difference between nature and God here. The most noticeable aspect is the emphasis on the sublime (e.g. "pleasing dread"), the manner in which the diction associates vastness and infinitude, time and space, with deity.

Early in Winter we read of wind and rain storms. At the peak of the storm

> Huge uproar lords it wide. The clouds, commixed
> With stars swift-gliding, sweep along the sky.
> All Nature reels: till Nature's King, who oft
> Amid tempestuous darkness dwells alone,
> And on the wings of the careering wind

> Walks dreadfully serene, commands a calm;
> Then straight air, sea, and earth are hushed at once.
> (ll. 195-201)

Sixteen lines later he begins an address with, "Father of light and life! thou Good Supreme!" In these cases we do have an expression of what appears to be a genuine religion of nature, which provides the poem with a sort of classical universality.

Thomson's attitude towards his subject in The Seasons is revealed in his attempt to provide it with epic proportions and dignity. In lines 425-35 of Winter the poet expresses the desire to pass the stormy winter evenings in contemplation with friends near a rural fire "And hold high converse with the mighty dead—". Among other things, they would together

> anticipate those scenes
> Of happiness and wonder, where the mind,
> In endless growth and infinite ascent,
> Rises from state to state, and world to world.
> (ll. 605-8)

Again we see how Thomson's conceptions of time, space, and soul-development are a significant part of his theology.

That beautiful poem, A Hymn On The Seasons (1730), exhibits best of all Thomson's artistic blending of various religious sources. The Shaftesburyian vision of a universe of harmony, beauty, and beneficence is certainly in evidence, but the Book of Job, Psalm 148, and Paradise Lost provide equally important background for the poem. All four of these sources stress God's

power and benevolence; universal beauty and harmony; divine immanence; the necessity for all created things to praise God. The Hymn includes all of these ideas with the addition of "religious progressivism".[13] The last four psalms may be grouped together as one song. They consist of an enumeration of the works of God and exhort all living things to a song of praise and thanksgiving. Thomson is concerned mainly with Psalm 148, a segment of which follows:

> PRAISE ye the LORD. Praise
> ye the LORD from the heav-
> ens: praise him in the heights.
> 2 Praise ye him, all his angels:
> praise ye him, all his hosts.
> 3 Praise ye him, sun and moon:
> praise him, all ye stars of light.
> 4 Praise him, ye heavens of heav-
> ens, and ye waters that be above
> the heavens.
> 5 Let them praise the name of the
> LORD: for he commanded, and
> they were created.
> .....
> 10 Beasts, and all cattle; creeping
> things, and flying fowl:
> 11 Kings of the earth, and all peo-
> ple; princes, and all judges of the
> earth:
> 12 Both young men, and maidens;
> old men, and children:
> 13 Let them praise the name of
> the LORD: for his name alone is
> excellent; his glory is above the
> earth and heaven.
> 14 He also exalteth the horn of
> his people, the praise of all his
> saints; even of the children of Is-
> rael, a people near unto him.
> Praise ye the LORD.

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[13] McKillop, op. cit., p. 42.

The Book of Job is a long and distinguished poem. Much of the latter part of it concerns the subject of the might and power of God:

> 7 He stretched out the north
> over the empty place, and hangeth
> the earth upon nothing.
> 8 He bindeth up the waters in
> his thick clouds; and the cloud is
> not rent under them.
> 9 He holdeth back the face of his
> throne, and spreadeth his cloud
> upon it.
> 10 He hath compassed the waters
> with bounds, until the day
> and night come to an end.
> 11 The pillars of heaven tremble
> and are astonished at his reproof.
> 12 He divideth the sea with his
> power, and by his understanding
> he smiteth through the proud.
> 13 By his spirit he hath garnished
> the heavens; his hand hath formed
> the crooked serpent.
> 14 Lo, these are parts of his ways:
> but how little a portion is heard of
> him? but the thunder of his power
> who can understand.
>
> (chapter 26)

Somewhat similar to those in the two quotations above are the ideas contained in these lines from Paradise Lost (V, 153-65; and 192-99):

> 'These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
> Almighty, thine this universal frame,
> Thus wondrous fair; thyself how wondrous then!
> Unspeakable, who sitt'st above these heavens
> To us invisible, or dimly seen
> In these thy lowest works, yet these declare
> Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine.
> Speak, ye who best can tell, ye sons of Light,
> Angels, for ye behold him, and with songs
> And choral symphonies, day without night,
> Circle his throne rejoicing, ye in Heaven,
> On Earth join, all ye creatures, to extol

Him first, him last, him midst, and without end.
.....
His praise, ye Winds, that from four quarters blow,
Breathe soft or loud, and wave your tops, ye Pines,
With every Plant, in sign of worship wave.
Fountains, and ye that warble as ye flow
Melodious murmurs, warbling tune his praise.
Join voices, all ye living Souls; ye Birds,
That, singing, up to Heaven-gate ascend,
Bear on your wings and in your notes his praise....'

Now compare with all of this the following pieces from the Hymn.

These, as they change, Almighty Father! these
Are but the varied God. The rolling year
Is full of thee. Forth in the pleasing Spring
Thy beauty walks, thy tenderness and love.
Wide flush the fields; the softening air is balm;
Echo the mountains round; the forest smiles;
And every sense, and every heart, is joy.
(ll. 1-7)

On the whirlwind's wing
Riding sublime, thou bidst the world adore,
And humblest nature with thy northern blast.

Mysterious round! what skill, what force divine,
Deep-felt in these appear! a simple train,
Yet so delightful mixed, with such kind art,
Such beauty and beneficence combined,
Shade unperceived so softening into shade,
And all so forming an harmonious whole
That, as they still succeed, they ravish still.
(ll. 18-27)

Nature, attend! join, every living soul
Beneath the spacious temple of the sky,
In adoration join; and ardent raise
One general song!
(ll. 37-40)

Should fate command me to the farthest verge
Of the green earth, to distant barbarous climes,
Rivers unknown to song, where first the sun
Gilds Indian mountains, or his setting beam
Flames on the Atlantic isles, 'tis nought to me;
Since God is ever present, ever felt,
In the void waste as in the city full,
And where he vital spreads there must be joy.

> When even at last the solemn hour shall come,
> And wing my mystic flight to future worlds,
> I cheerful will obey; there, with new powers,
> Will rising wonders sing:...
> (ll. 100-11)

Those first seven lines of the Hymn are certainly inspired by the deistical tendencies prevalent in Thomson's day. The next passage (ll. 18-27) reveals a blending of ideas from Job (divine power) and Shaftesbury (optimism, beauty, beneficence, and harmony). Lines 37-40, and the remainder of that passage in the Hymn, appear to be modelled on Psalm 148 and the morning hymn (above) of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost. In his response to creation, and in his awareness and gratitude to God, Thomson is much closer to Milton than to Pope, who wrote that explicitly deistic poem, An Essay On Man. The final segment from the Hymn shows, once again, Thomson's tendency to include notions of the sublime and the vast in his conception of deity. The phrase "with new powers" refers, of course, to his theory of increasing knowledge or soul-development. Thomson utilizes his various sources to arrive at an original poetic view. His fusion of emotion and intellect reveals an admirable degree of artistic control.

It is mainly when Thomson is in rhapsody, an emotional state inspired by solitary contemplation of nature and the cosmos, that we see his religious feelings. The deism in his poetry is largely employed as an

imaginative element; not as an agressive anti-Christian statement. Neither of his major poems uses revealed Christianity as the sole basis of its theology. On the other nand, there is none of the sometimes vigorous, anti-Christian attitude expressed by Tindal, Bolingbroke, and Shaftesbury.[14]

The religious ideas discussed so far are also in evidence throughout the delightful Castle of Indolence (1748). The poem's motif consists of a combination of the ideas of temperance and industry, or at least this appears to have been the poet's intention. The notion of Indolence (in Canto I) as an attractive way of life seems at times to get the upper hand; indeed, it constitutes the best poetry. The poem is written in imitation of Book II of Spenser's Faerie Queene. The wizard, Indolence, is corrupting the country with his castle of luxury and pleasure (Canto I). The Knight of Art and Industry captures Indolence, overthrows the castle, and saves many of its inhabitants from a life of sloth (Canto II). Generally speaking there is an emphasis on harmony and the well-balanced personality, in addition to the necessity for hard work and commercial progress. It is an expression of the attitude of mind - philosophically, politically, artistically - which was characteristic of Thomson's era.

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[14] Courthope, op. cit., p. 275.

What we are concerned with at this point is the religious element. At approximately the half-way point of Canto II, Sir Industry requests his bard to sing his song of "heavenly fire" to touch the souls of those who are still not poisoned beyond hope by the wizard. Here is part of that song:

> What is the adored Supreme perfection? say!
> What, but eternal never-resting soul,
> Almighty power, and all-directing day,
> By whom each atom stirs, the planets roll;
> Who fills, surrounds, informs, and agitates the whole?
> (stanza xlvii)

> 'Come, to the beaming God your hearts unfold!
> Draw from its fountain life! 'Tis thence alone
> We can excel. Up from unfeeling mould
> To seraphs burning round the Almighty's throne,
> Life rising still on life in higher tone
> Perfection forms, and with perfection bliss.
> In universal nature this clear shown
> Not needeth proof: to prove it were, I wis,
> To prove the beauteous world excels the brute abyss.
> (stanza xlviii)

And further on he continues:

> Toil, and be glad! let Industry inspire
> Into your quickened limbs her buoyant breath!
> Who does not act is dead; absorpt entire
> In miry sloth, no pride, no joy he hath:
> O leaden-hearted men, to be in love with death!
> (stanza liv)

Canto II ends on a note of puritanical didacticism, which comes dangerously close to making it a failure. The stanzas above involve a curious combination of Shaftesburyian deism, Calvinist theology, and spiritual evolution as viewed by Thomson.[15] The poet has combined with his doctrine of

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[15]See also in connection with this latter idea Canto II, stanza lxxii.

progressive perfection the Calvinistic idea of hard work as essential for salvation. I mentioned the phrase "curious combination" above, and before we can understand the issue, we must recall an idea of Shaftesbury's mentioned in the summary of his philosophy (pp. 20-30) Shaftesbury, unlike the Calvinists, stresses the innate goodness of man.[16] It has been shown that Thomson's religious views in his poetry reflect a strong Shaftesburyian influence. But the combination of deism and Calvinism is not so strange after all, since Thomson had the Calvinist doctrine ingrained in him as a child and as a divinity student. During the latter part of his divinity studies, and following his move to London, he became increasingly attracted to the deism of Shaftesbury and those with similar ideas.

Critics have noted more explicit Biblical parallels in The Castle, and have used them to clarify the seemingly ambivalent character of Thomson's first canto.[17] The poet's apparent delight and sympathy with the indolence and luxury

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[16] Both Shaftesbury and Calvin, however, exhibit a love of external nature, and see it as manifesting the beauty and goodness of God. See Marjorie Hope Nicholson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory (first published in 1959; New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1963), p. 97.

[17] Robert J. Griffin, "Thomson's The Castle of Indolence", The Explicator, XXI (December, 1962), Article 33.

described strikes one as slightly incongruous with his didactic aim - the morality of Canto II. Actually the poem may be more unified thematically than is generally recognized; that is, if we identify its scriptural imitation. The apparent oddity of the parallel between the wizard's song (Canto I) and Christ's Sermon on the Mount is explained in Canto II. Here Indolence turns out to be Satan, or Antichrist, a false saviour. This ties in with the Biblical allusions in the first canto, since the Knight of Art and Industry, in the manner of Christ's defeat of the Antichrist and "harrowing of hell" on the Day of Judgement, destroys the wizard's false paradise. The paradise of Canto I is only a false one - a hell.

Thomson's religious sentiments are not strictly orthodox, but he is in agreement with many of the Christian teachings. He draws on many sources to make his poetry, and in The Castle he follows part of the Christian myth, as does his model, Spenser. It is possible also that his use of this particular conceptual framework for his two-part poem is an indication of a return to orthodoxy near the end of his life.[18]

Poetry requires a faith, but what form that faith takes is open to discussion. There is little doubt that there is a faith underlying Thomson's poetry, even though

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[18] See Grant, op. cit., p. 270.

it is pliant, eclectic, nebulous. Thus, even though the greater part of his work shows definite deistic leanings, it is inaccurate to say that on the whole it affirms a specific religious doctrine. For our purposes, it is important to note that in the process of fusing poetically these several religious strands, he reveals a profoundly religious attitude towards nature.

It is interesting to attempt to establish precisely the religious nature of Thomson's poetry as an exercise in the "History of Ideas"; to show just how it fits into literary tradition and the trends of his day. As for purposes of evaluation, it does not matter if he is expounding revealed or rational religion, since neither constitutes a standard for poetic value. What is of significance is that the aesthetic ambiguity inherent in his religious attitude carries with it an emotional element that is consistent and convincing.

Earlier in this chapter I included Fairchild's comment that, "It would be hard to find a poet whose ideas are more organically related to his art". Another way of saying this, I believe, is that Thomson's concept of nature and cosmos develops into a poetical myth involving ideas from Virgil and Lucretius; the Great Chain of Being; Shaftesburyian philosophy; Newtonianism; Christianity; Pantheism; and, to a minor degree, Pythagorean doctrine.

Any poetical myth has a system of symbols. Some of the symbols of Thomson's myth are: the Universal Soul, Parent of good, or the Supreme perfection; the sun; and, of course, the objects of external nature.

In post-Copernican astronomy the new conceptions of space and time make the problem of God more complex, as has been noted by Ernest Tuveson:

> It seems to be a characteristic of the human mind that it must construct symbols before it can fully assimilate great changes in philosophical, religious, or scientific ideas. The structure of symbols associated with the old cosmology had been largely destroyed as the basic ideas which had generated them were superseded. There was an urgent need, in the seventeenth century, to find new symbols which would enable Western man to comprehend what had happened to his universe. Among them, I believe, is the "natural sublime" - the vast, and unlimited in external nature. As the second part of this study, I shall attempt to show how the new symbol grew out of new ideas about space, time, and divine omnipresence. From the new symbol in turn came a new sensibility to nature.[19]

Thomson retains some of the symbols of the old cosmology (the Great Chain, for instance), but any consideration of the relationship between his theology and his poetry must inevitably include the "natural sublime". It is interesting to consider the "structural principles" which we said arise out of The Seasons in light of the ideas

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[19]Ernest Tuveson, "Space, Deity and the 'Natural Sublime'", Modern Language Quarterly [hereafter cited as MLQ], XII (March, 1951), 21.

outlined in the quotation above. In his Democritus Platonissans (Cambridge, 1646), Henry More associates God's presence with space; equates the vastness of space with the omnipresence of God.[20] For More space is an attribute of God, and there is evidence in Newtonianism of an affinity with this notion. Newton considers space the sensorium of God.[21] Like the soul in the body, it is by means of space that God acts in nature.

These new ideas caused a new system of symbols - a new aesthetic - the main criteria of which were the qualities of immensity, unlimitedness, and awe. This, it appears, is also one of the main reasons for Thomson's preoccupation with scientific detail. "If the being of God is in the vast reaches of space, it is also in each particle; we can indeed see 'infinity in a grain of sand'".[22] The following chapter will include a discussion of passages in Thomson based largely on scientific, geographical, and travel literature. These scientific passages, as well as those of a religious nature already mentioned, are related to the symbol of the "natural

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[20] Ibid., p. 24.

[21] Newton's Philosophy of Nature, ed. H. S. Thayer (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1953), p. 156.

[22] Tuveson, op. cit., p. 25.

sublime", which forms a large part of the myth in Thomson's nature poetry.[23]

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[23] I use the term "myth" here in the same sense in which it is employed by E. M. W. Tillyard in his Some Mythical Elements in English Literature (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961). He observes that, "One of the great eighteenth-century myths was that of retirement from the busy world to a retreat, preferably in the country, from which to study the glories of God as revealed in nature and to contemplate the approach of death." (p. 72) The descriptions in The Seasons, and Thomson's theory of spiritual progression and immortality, confirm the latter part of Tillyard's statement.

CHAPTER IV:

SCIENCE AND GEOGRAPHY AS POETRY

> The world is poetical intrinsically
> and what it means is simply itself.
> Its significance is the enormous
> mystery of its existence and of our
> awareness of that existence.
>
> Aldous Huxley,
> Literature and Science (Harper and
> Row, 1963), p. 111.

Will science put out poetry? This is a difficult question; but the answer seems to be that it is highly unlikely such a development will ever happen. Judging from the past, science appears to provide the poet with new materia poetica which he familiarizes and humanizes. The essential aspect of nature with which poetry has to do is beauty:

> Poets are, in a special way, kindlers of sensibility, teachers who make us observe more carefully, and feel more keenly the wonders that are around us:...[1]

In relation to Thomson, of course, these are the ideas with which we shall be concerned in this chapter.

In the two decades immediately preceding Thomson's birth, and during his short lifetime, one may observe many discoveries in the fields of astronomy, physics, botany, microbiology, geography, and geology. The new theories of the earth and interest in vastness, sublimity, and geological time spark, in the writings of the Age of Reason, cosmic and terrestrial excursions illustrating the principle of plenitude and almost every possible variety of existence. In addition to the great scientific works of Newton, such popular writings as Thomas Burnet's Sacred

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[1] Shairp, op. cit., p. vi.

Theory of the Earth (1684), and Shaftesbury's Characteristicks, there emerges from this period also a great amount of so-called travel literature and books dealing with geography and botany. Thomson makes use of much of this material in his poetry. What I shall attempt to show in the next few pages is that the poet vitalizes this new knowledge of his age. Not only do scientific theory and truth "become a part of him", become (at times) transfigured by his imagination, but the passages incorporating this material are worked carefully into the overall structure of the poems.

Herbert Drennon has contributed much historical evidence of Thomson's contact with Newtonianism and his interest in natural philosophy generally.[2] According to him, natural philosophy became established at the University of Edinburgh from the year 1683. Thomson entered the University in 1715. The institution was a centre of widespread interest in Newton's philosophy, and during the poet's ten years of study (1715-1725) a number of Newtonian scholars and disciples were associated with it.

Thomson arrived in London in 1725. In May of 1726

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[2]Herbert Drennon, "James Thomson's Contact with Newtonianism and his Interest in Natural Philosophy", PMLA, XLIX (March, 1934), 71-80.

he took the position of tutor at Mr. Watt's Academy in Little Tower-Street. This school, under the guidance of highly qualified instructors, gave courses in geography, astronomy, and experimental philosophy.[3] Thomas and William Watts and James Sterling, also instructors at the academy, were all considerable mathematicians and scientists, and quite familiar with the works of Newton. In fact Sterling knew and corresponded with Newton himself, and it is believed that at some time or other Thomson secured an introduction to the great man. There were courses given at the academy involving an explanation of the nature of vision, light, and colour as outlined in Newton's Optics. The discoveries of Galileo were also taught. It was at this school that Thomson developed a considerable interest in Newtonian philosophy and other aspects of science and geography; so much so, in fact, that it had a great influence on his thoughts about nature and may be seen in his poetic imagery:

> Meantime, refracted from yon eastern cloud,
> Bestriding earth, the grand etherial bow
> Shoots up immense; and every hue unfolds,
> In fair proportion running from the red
> To where the violet fades into the sky.
> Here, awful Newton, the dissolving clouds
> Form, fronting on the sun, thy showery prism;
> And to the sage-instructed eye unfold

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[3] Grant, op. cit., pp. 56-58.

> The various twine of light, by thee disclosed
> From the white mingling maze.
> (Spring, 203-12)

Here Thomson is not concerned with scientific ideas per se. First of all, these lines on the rainbow come naturally in his description of earth and sky following the spring rain shower. He makes use of Newton's discovery to increase the vividness of his imagery, and thereby provide a more articulate presentation of the scene. The moving clouds fronting the sun, and the resultant rainbow, immediately remind the poet of Newton's prism. In other words, the cloud cover is viewed in terms of the prism. This allows him to place more emphasis on the colours. The diction creates the natural sublime. Words and phrases like "Bestriding earth", "grand", "immense", "white mingling maze", suggest vastness, the awe-inspiring. It may be difficult for the modern reader to grasp the full significance of the phrase "awful Newton". Newton's ranging of the outer limits of the universe with telescope and brain had an effect on the people of his day, as might almost be compared with that which the physical presence of men on the moon has on us. The poet is greatly impressed by modern science, but the most noticeable thing in the passage above is his sense of beauty and awe at sight of the rainbow. As shown by the lines which follow, despite the scientific insight

he has acquired concerning its origin and structure, he still knows the wonder of the swain who runs "To catch the falling glory" (l. 215).

Near the beginning of Summer Thomson makes use of the Newtonian principle of gravitation:

> With what an awful world-revolving power
> Were first the unwieldly planets launched along
> The illimitable void!—thus to remain,
> Amid the flux of many thousand years
> That oft has swept the toiling race of men,
> And all their laboured monuments away,
> Firm, unremitting, matchless in their course;
> To the kind-tempered change of night and day,
> And of the seasons ever stealing round,
> Minutely faithful: such the all-perfect Hand
> That poised, impels, and rules the steady whole!
> (ll. 32-42)

The appropriateness of these lines on the movement of the planets and the cause of day and night may be seen in the fact that our poet intends to describe summer in terms of one whole summer's day. He is about to mention the sunrise: therefore the passage above serves as part of his introduction. There is nothing minutely scientific here; he draws on the Newtonian principle to enforce the feeling of wonder associated with space, time, natural harmony, and the power and beneficence of the "all-perfect Hand". Although the law of gravitation eventually becomes to be thought of as a mechanistic principle, Thomson does not appear to mind. He is a poet, not a scientist, and he prefers to think of an active and omnipresent intelligence, an "instinct" or "impulse" behind it all.

Here is another illustration of the Newtonian influence:

> 'Tis by thy secret, strong, attractive force,
> As with a chain indissoluble bound,
> Thy system rolls entire—from the far bourne
> Of utmost Saturn, wheeling wide his round
> Of thirty years, to Mercury, whose disk
> Can scarce be caught by philosophic eye,
> Lost in the near effulgence of thy blaze.
> Informer of the planetary train!
> Without whose quickening glance their cumbrous orbs
> Were brute unlovely mass, inert and dead,
> And not, as now, the green abodes of life!
> (Summer, ll. 97-107)

Thomson speaks here, of course, of the rôle of the sun in gravitational force. What distinguishes this from a mere scientific description is the poet's excitement at the beauty and sublimity of the sun's light, which is responsible for the difference between a "brute unlovely mass, inert and dead," and the "green abodes of life!"

It requires little searching to discover Thomson's awareness of the aesthetic implications of Newton's Optics. In The Seasons in particular he attempts to arrive at an aesthetic of colour and light:

> The unfruitful rock itself, impregned by thee,
> In dark retirement forms the lucid stone.
> The lively diamond drinks thy purest rays,
> Collected light compact; that, polished bright,
> And all its native lustre let abroad,
> Dares, as it sparkles on the fair one's breast,
> With vain ambition emulate her eyes.
> At thee the ruby lights its deepening glow,
> And with a waving radiance inward flames.
> From thee the sapphire, solid ether, takes
> Its hue cerulean; and, of evening tinct,
> The purple-streaming amethyst is thine
> With thy own smile the yellow topaz burns;
> Nor deeper verdure dyes the robe of Spring,
> When first she gives it to the southern gale,

> Than the green emerald shows. But, all combined,
> Thick through the whitening opal play thy beams;
> Or, flying several from its surface, form
> A trembling variance of revolving hues
> As the sight varies in the gazer's hand.
> (Summer, ll. 140-59)

Thomson makes use of a poetic technique employed by Milton (and which did not originate with him) - the idea that the penetrative power of the sun is important for the mineral, as well as the vegetable world.[4] The material is humanized by the use of personification and the reference to the fair sex. Thomson combines geological imagery with that of Newton's prism to emphasize the beauty and sublimity of the sunlight.

Marjorie Hope Nicolson has shown that there is evidence in Thomson's work of a notable distinction between "colour" as "beautiful" and "light" as "sublime".[5] Spring, as already seen in connection with the rainbow, reflects more emphasis on colour. In Summer the poet appears to be more concerned with light, especially excessive light and heat; the awful, radiant, effulgent God. In this season he uses language to indicate what we might call the "pleasure-pain" effect of the sublime. If excessive light is sublime, so is excessive darkness:

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[4]See Paradise Lost, Bk. II, ll. 583-86, 606-12.

[5]Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Newton Demands the Muse: Newton's Opticks and the Eighteenth Century Poets (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 110.

> At every step,
> Solemn and slow the shadows blacker fall,
> And all is awful listening gloom around.
> (ll. 519-21)

> Shook sudden from the bosom of the sky,
> A thousand shapes or glide athwart the dusk
> Or stalk majestic on. Deep-roused, I feel
> A sacred terror, a severe delight,
> Creep through my mortal frame;...
> (ll. 538-42)

This conveys the psychological effect of viewing the deprivation of light.

In keeping with his intention of describing the summer season in terms of one day, Thomson has a passage on the sunset near the end of Summer. In the original text of the poem (1727-38) the lines are strongly Newtonian (the clouds as prism again). He writes of the clouds fronting the sun as follows:

> Their dewy mirrors numberless opposed,
> Unfold the hidden riches of his ray,
> And chase a change of colours round the sky.
> 'Tis all one blush from east to west; and now,
> Behind the dusky earth, he dips his orb.
> (ll. 1623-27)

In the final version of the poem Thomson decides to change this to:

> In all their pomp attend his setting throne.
> Air, earth, and ocean smile immense. And now,
> As if his weary chariot sought the bowers
> Of Amphitrite and her tending nymphs,
> (So Grecian fable sung) he dips his orb;
> Now half-immersed; and now, a golden curve,
> Gives one bright glance, then total disappears.
> (ll. 1623-29)

Coleridge has said that images

> become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; . . . or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit,[6]

which is exactly the case of Thomson's final version of the sunset. He improves on the passage by making it correspond more with that of the sunrise near the beginning of Summer ("But yonder comes the powerful king of day/ Rejoicing in the east..."). Whereas the original is scientific, the new version is more imaginative. There is a greater sense of "pomp" and majesty befitting the departure of the king of day. The enthusiasm engendered by the scene prompts him to introduce a classical allusion by way of comparison. "Smile" and "weary" suggest a quality of "human and intellectual life". It is difficult to say why Thomson discarded the Newtonian image of the original, but the end result is certainly more vivid, human, and appropriate (when compared with the description of the sunrise).

Newton's influence is sometimes conveyed so subtly as not to be easily recognized. The Seasons, being a cyclical poem, deals largely with the changing face of nature in space and time. Thus the descriptions involve

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[6] Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (in two volumes, London: Oxford University Press, 1907), II, 16.

what we have already mentioned elsewhere as "transformational" language, which frequently results in an admirable artistic effect. For Thomson nature exists in a tripartite framework: "ether", "middle air", and "earth". "Ether" is the purer air of the clouds and heavens; "middle air" refers to the space between ether and earth; and, of course, "earth" is the area in which we live and breathe.[7] In his writings on the theory of light and colours Newton says that there is a certain "etherial medium" (ether) which is far rarer than air and more strongly elastic:

> Fifthly, it is to be supposed that light and ether mutually act upon one another, ether in refracting light and light in warming ether, and that the densest ether acts most strongly.[8]

Thomson makes use of these and related ideas when he writes:

> Confessed from yonder slow-extinguished clouds,
> All ether softening, sober Evening takes
> Her wonted station in the middle air,
> A thousand shadows at her beck. First this
> She sends on earth; then that of deeper dye
> Steals soft behind; and then a deeper still,
> In circle following circle, gathers round
> To close the face of things.
> (Summer, ll. 1647-54)

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[7] Ralph Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time", in Howard Anderson and John S. Shea, eds., Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), p. 176.

[8] Newton's Philosophy of Nature, ed. Thayer, p. 92.

The mixture of personification with natural description is typical of The Seasons. With his use of this technique Thomson continually suggests a relationship between the natural and the human orders. Trace carefully the shift in time and space inherent in the passage. This unique talent of being able to create a sense of unfolding time, of change in colour or position of our natural surroundings, is one of the most important aspects of Thomson's art. As indicated above, and in the lines on the sunset in the preceding paragraph, Thomson achieves this effect partly by using words and phrases like: "now"; "And now"; "then"; "First this"; "then that"; "and then"; "following"; and "gathers". Any aspect of the above passage which could be labelled "scientific" is obscured by mood, a mood created by the words "softening", "sober", "shadows", "steals soft", and repetition of "deeper".

A further example of Thomson's preoccupation with the sublimity of excessive light and darkness occurs in Autumn:

> Now black and deep the night begins to fall,
> A shade immense! Sunk in the quenching gloom,
> Magnificent and vast, are heaven and earth.
> Order confounded lies, all beauty void,
> Distinction lost, and gay variety
> One universal blot—such the fair power
> Of light to kindle and create the whole.
> (ll. 1138-44)

Thomson combines science with the traditional Biblical

idea of light creating order out of chaos. The diction employed suggests almost perfectly the image (or non-image) intended, the sense of vagueness, of a great nothingness. This time he uses the notion of the deprivation of light to suggest the magnificence and vastness of heaven and earth, in addition to seeming disorder in an otherwise harmonious universe. But, as Thomson seldom fails to show, temporary disorder in nature has a corresponding effect in the human order. Continuing from the lines above he goes on to mention a "benighted wretch",

> Who then bewildered wanders through the dark
> Full of pale fancies and chimeras huge;
> (ll. 1146-47)

until

> Now lost and now renewed, he sinks absorbed,
> Rider and horse, amid the miry gulf—
> While still, from day to day, his pining wife
> And plaintive children his return await,
> In wild conjecture lost.
> (ll. 1155-59)

We shall continue to see that Thomson's work incorporating scientific and geographical material is always overlaid by strong human sentiment or combined with pathetic reflection.

Sir Isaac Newton died on March 20, 1727. In addition to exhibiting a feeling of deep grief and personal loss, Thomson's A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton (1727) provides an admirable summary of Newton's

discoveries. Since a list of the subject's achievements befits a poem of this nature, the poet is accurate and comprehensive.[9] In his introduction he mentions the scientist's work on earth and this becomes interfused with allusions to his new state:

> SHALL the great soul of Newton quit this earth
> To mingle with his stars, and every Muse,
> Astonished into silence, shun the weight
> Of honours due to his illustrious name?
> But what can man? Even now the sons of light,
> In strains high warbled to seraphic lyre,
> Hail his arrival on the coast of bliss.
> (ll. 1-7)

Newton's discovery of the nature of light is presented with this same near-perfect balance of visual image and sadness of tone:

> Even Light itself, which every thing displays,
> Shone undiscovered, till his brighter mind
> Untwisted all the shining robe of day;
> And, from the whitening undistinguished blaze,
> Collecting every ray into his kind,
> To the charmed eye educed the gorgeous train
> Of parent colours. First the flaming red
> Sprung vivid forth; the tawny orange next;
> And next delicious yellow; by whose side
> Fell the kind beams of all-refreshing green.
> Then the pure blue, that swells autumnal skies,
> Etherial played; and then, of sadder hue,
> Emerged the deepened indigo, as when
> The heavy-skirted evening droops with frost;
> While the last gleamings of refracted light
> Died in the fainting violet away.
> (ll. 96-111)

As these lines indicate, the poem has a sense of grief

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[9]Thomson consulted Mr. John Gray, a Newtonian scholar, for assistance. See Grant, op. cit., p. 72.

combined with praise and vivid scientific imagery, and the whole is presented with delicacy and imagination. At the end Thomson implies that Newton's life and achievement is a moral example, since the great man united science and humanity:

> O'er thy dejected country chief preside,
> And be her Genius called! her studies raise,
> Correct her manners, and inspire her youth;
> For, though depraved and sunk, she brought thee forth,
> And glories in thy name! she points thee out
> To all her sons, and bids them eye thy star:
> While, in expectance of the second life
> When time shall be no more, thy sacred dust
> Sleeps with her kings, and dignifies the scene.
> (ll. 201-9)

Thomson speaks from the heart to the heart. Much of his poetry is a fusion of sensibility and science, but in this poem, more than in any other, there is an added element of dignity.

Contemporary scientific fact becomes poetry in the following metaphor taken from To the Memory of The Right Honourable The Lord Talbot:

> Yes, she may sing his matchless virtues now—
> Unhappy that she may! But where begin?
> How from the diamond single out each ray,
> That, though they tremble with ten thousand hues,
> Effuse one poignant undivided light?
> (ll. 9-13)

Lord Talbot and his son were great friends of the poet. What happens here is that the Newtonian image of the prismatic colours inherent in the light of the diamond

becomes, in a moment of poetic inspiration, "modified by a predominant passion" (a combination of grief and praise). The result is that the diamond's rays and Talbot's "matchless virtues" become one idea.

In his selection of subject matter Thomson reflects the great influence being exerted by science and natural philosophy, but these do not dominate his artistic viewpoint or poetic art. Like many of the rationalists of the day - John Wilkins, Robert Wittie, Thomas Burnet, Henry Pemberton, Joseph Addison, Isaac Barrow, Joseph Glanvill, and Newton himself - Thomson shows enthusiasm for the beauty, harmony, and sublimity of external nature as proving the existence and attributes of God.[10] On the other hand, his treatment of nature is not for the most part objective. He reveals his own mood:

> Thomson describes not so much the naked object as what he sees in his mind's eye, surrounded and glowing with the mild, bland, genial vapours of his brain:...[11]

His ability to catch also the mood of nature is one of the main reasons why he has been remembered. His use

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[10] Herbert Drennon, "Scientific Rationalism and James Thomson's Poetic Art", SP, XXXI (July, 1934), 454-57.

[11] William Hazlitt, "Mr. Campbell and Mr. Crabbe", The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (first published 1930-34; Centenary Edition in twenty-one volumes, New York: Ams Press, Inc., 1967), XI, 166.

of light and shade, the scene involving the robin in Winter (ll. 245-56), and situations leading up to and following storms, are indicative of mood. Like Donne and Milton before him, Thomson sometimes provides scientific description, but at the same time he conveys his own sentiment. Much of the scientific detail helps to enforce the poet's sense of wonder at the variety, vastness, and majesty of nature. Thus his preoccupation with the disclosures of the "optic tube". Scientific rationalism or philosophical reflection on nature (which is essentially the same thing at this time) does not determine his poetic theory; it is exactly the other way round. His aesthetic view of nature awakens him to philosophical reflection. This we learn from his Preface to the second edition of Winter already quoted in an earlier chapter (p. 35). It is not so much that Thomson considers the world more beautiful because Newton has reduced much of its mystery, or that his scientific attitude lies at the basis of his taste for poetry; rather his desire after knowledge is an effect or result of his taste for the sublime and the beautiful in things. He is concerned more with visual image than with scientific cause:

> Thomson's poetic gifts are obviously not to be derived exclusively from his scientific thought; it would be better to state that his immediate poetic enjoyment of nature was

modified, or perhaps overlaid, by his Newtonianism.[12]

Thomson's poetic use of Newtonian and other scientific imagery does not detract from the dominant mood of his poems, which is to be found, I think, in passages like these:

> Welcome, kindred glooms!
> Cogenial horrors hail! With frequent foot,
> Pleased have I, in my cheerful morn of life,
> When nursed by careless solitude I lived
> And sung of Nature with unceasing joy,
> Pleased have I wandered through your rough domain;
> Trod the pure virgin-snows, myself as pure;
> (Winter, ll. 5-11)

> A pleasing land of drowsyhed it was:
> Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;
> And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,
> For ever flushing round a summer sky:...
> (The Castle of Indolence, Canto I, vi)

To sing the songs of science the poet must be almost perfectly at home in all the new truths, must move among them with ease and freedom. Similarly, the scientific thoughts must not be too remote or technical for his audience. At least the more educated must have become familiar with such thoughts before the poet can deal with them successfully. This is largely the case with Thomson.

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[12] Quoted from a review of Herbert Drennon, "Scientific rationalism and James Thomson's poetic art", SP, XXXI (July, 1934), 453-71. The review is contained in Louis I. Bredvold, "English Literature, 1660-1800: A Current Bibliography", PQ, XIV (April, 1935), 175-76.

His popularity was not restricted to the highly educated. In art a large amount of detail sought for its own sake may be inappropriate. In good art detail is employed as a means of achieving a specific purpose. Thomson makes use of considerable scientific detail, since "All aspects of Nature are beautiful in their own peculiar way, serve a particular function, and are worthy of our observation and praise". This is the first of the structural principles mentioned in the second chapter.

It occurs to me that we ought mainly to consider Thomson's poetic achievement, what we mean here by his poetic use of philosophy, science, and religion, in light of his stated intentions and opinions in available documents, and, in addition, in the light of what poets and critics of the period generally considered to be "poetic". This does not necessarily mean that we cannot refer an idea or technique of the poet to that of some later critic. What has been said concerning structural principles and the concept of the "natural sublime" may, as we shall see, be easily subsumed under the ideas contained in these "available documents" and other contemporary critical writings.

As has been shown from his Preface, Thomson sees nothing "more ready to awaken the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection . . . than the works of Nature." The passages in the poems bear out this statement.

Towards the end of Summer he mentions the beauty and mysterious sounds and shadows of evening. Occasionally at the close of day one might see the "wondrous shapes" of the aurora borealis, or the "rushing comet" from the "dread immensity of space". Immediately following a description of these Thomson launches into praise of philosophy:

> With thee, serene Philosophy, with thee,
> And thy bright garland, let me crown my song!
> Effusive source of evidence and truth!
> A lustre shedding o'er the ennobled mind,
> Stronger than summer-noon, and pure as that
> Whose mild vibrations soothe the parted soul,
> New to the dawning of celestial day.
> (ll. 1730-36)

He goes on to relate philosophy to poetry:

> Tutored by thee, hence Poetry exalts
> Her voice to ages; and informs the page
> With music, image, sentiment, and thought,
> Never to die; the treasure of mankind,
> Their highest honour, and their truest joy!
> (ll. 1753-57)

If we take "Tutored" here to mean "instructed", it is easy to see Thomson's meaning. As far as poetry is concerned, philosophy is of great use in that it provides the poet with newer and fresher images. Thomson is not concerned so much with profundity of ideas; his thoughts "Never to die" are poetic thoughts deepened and extended with music, associated images, and sentiment.

Early in Spring Thomson expresses great enthusiasm over the various kinds of vegetation supplied by the

"liberal hand" of nature. Arising from this is a digression on the Golden Age and the reasons for its decline. It is at this point that he sees fit to make use of a physico-theological account of the flood:

> Hence, in old dusky time, a deluge came:
> When the deep-cleft disparting orb, that arched
> The central waters round, impetuous rushed
> With universal burst into the gulf,
> And o'er the high-piled hills of fractured earth
> Wide-dashed the waves in undulation vast,
> Till, from the centre to the streaming clouds,
> A shoreless ocean tumbled round the globe.
> (ll. 309-16)

It was with the deluge that the so-called Golden Age ended. At least two scholars have traced this passage of Thomson's to Thomas Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth (1684).[13] Burnet attempts to demonstrate that the natural laws throughout the universe were decreed by God. The universe is in a "fallen" state, having been so since the Flood. Nevertheless, he attributes a scientific cause to the Flood - a crack in the earth's crust. Marjorie Hope Nicolson writes, "With the dawning conception of indefinite time, we shall find a greater stirring of imagination about earth processes."[14] Thomson is quite aware of the poetic potential of the sort of material provided by

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[13] Spacks, op. cit., p. 123.

[14] Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, p. 159.

Burnet's Sacred Theory. Being very much a man of his age, it is not surprising that Thomson's work represents to some degree the neo-classical dictum that poetry should both "teach" and "delight". On the other hand, he is more concerned with representing the "natural sublime" in the description above. According to Coleridge,

> The writings of PLATO, and Bishop TAYLOR, and the "Theoria Sacra" of BURNET, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre,[15]

which indicates that Thomson's source is in itself poetical. Our poet has added a few touches of his own, including, of course, the use of metre. To create an image of great space and show the violent energy of this phenomenon, he uses the words "universal burst", "high-piled", "wide-dashed", "vast", "shoreless" and "tumbled". Sometimes the effectiveness of Thomson's better passages is reduced by his frequent use of adjectives as adverbs.[16] In the lines above the one example of this which stands out is "impetuous rushed", but it is effective in emphasizing the meaning of the passage. A close reading of

> The central waters round, impetuous rushed

reveals that the rhythm requires a special stress on

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[15] Biographia Literaria, ed. Shawcross, II, ch. XIV, 11.

[16] Havens, op. cit., p. 133.

"impetuous", which means, of course, "of physical things, rushing with force and violence". One other aspect worthy of note in Thomson's description of the deluge is his grand ending, "A shoreless ocean tumbled round the globe." This creates a sort of Miltonic effect in accordance with the subject of the passage.

On one occasion in Autumn the poet's interest in a specific aspect of nature leads him into a long passage of scientific detail which he renders with vividness and enthusiasm. In the "Argument" to the poem the passage in question is introduced as follows:

> A description of fogs, frequent in the latter part of Autumn; whence a digression, inquiring into the rise of fountains and rivers.

It is the digression we are concerned with for the moment. It provides a perfect illustration of how Thomson combines several scientific sources in the process of arriving at a final poetic representation of the vastness and intricacy of the natural order. He shoots his being through earth, sea, and air in an attempt to create what he and his contemporaries considered "poetic." Before looking at this long passage on the rise of fountains and rivers, it is useful to study the following excerpts from the criticism of Addison and Johnson, since they throw much light on Thomson's lines:

> Our Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to graspe at any thing that is too big for its Capacity. We are flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views, and feel a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the Soul at the Apprehension of them.[17]

> "Being now resolved to be a poet, I saw every thing with a new purpose; my sphere of attention was suddenly magnified: no kind of knowledge was to be overlooked. I ranged mountains and deserts for images and resemblances, and pictured upon my mind every tree of the forest and flower of the valley. I observed with equal care the crags of the rock and the pinnacles of the palace. Sometimes I wandered along the mazes of the rivulet, and sometimes watched the changes of the summer clouds. To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination: he must be conversant with all that is awfully vast or elegantly little. The plants of the garden, the animals of the wood, the minerals of the earth, and meteors of the sky, must all concur to store his mind with inexhaustible variety: for every idea is useful for the inforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth; and he, who knows most, will have most power of diversifying his scenes, and of gratifying his reader with remote allusions and unexpected instruction...."[18]

In relation to Johnson's words ("every idea is useful for the inforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth;"), Thomson's poetry becomes much more meaningful,

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[17] Joseph Addison, The Spectator, No. 412 (June 23, 1712), in The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond (in five volumes, Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1965), III, 540.

[18] Samuel Johnson : Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), p. 527.

especially when we consider the marked presence of the religious motif or the natural sublime.

Alan D. McKillop has shown conclusively that Thomson obtains most of his material for the passage we are about to examine from at least four sources: Edmund Halley's "An Account of the Circulation of the Watry Vapours of the Sea, and of the Cause of Springs" (1691); the General Geography (1733) of Bernhard Verenius; William Derham's Physico-Theology (1713); and especially for the final revision, the theory of one, Abbé Pluche, whose Spectacle de la Nature; or Nature Display'd, was translated into English by Samuel Humphreys in 1733 (I, 1733; II and III, 1736; IV, 1739).[19] Halley's theory holds that springs originate from the condensation of vapours on the tops of mountains (ll. 736-42 of Thomson):

> These roving mists, that constant now begin
> To smoke along the hilly country, these,
> With weighty rains and melted Alpine snows,
> The mountain-cisterns fill—those ample stores
> Of water, scooped among the hollow rocks,
> Whence gush the streams, the ceaseless fountains play,
> And their unfailing wealth the rivers draw.

Verenius and Derham advocate a theory of percolation (Thomson, ll. 743-56):

> Some sages say, that, where the numerous wave
> For ever lashes the resounding shore,

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[19] McKillop, op. cit., pp. 77-88.

Drilled through the sandy stratum, every way,
The waters with the sandy stratum rise;
Amid whose angles infinitely strained,
They joyful leave their jaggy salts behind,
And clear and sweeten as they soak along.
Nor stops the restless fluid, mounting still,
Though oft amid the irriguous vale it springs;
But, to the mountain courted by the sand,
That leads it darkling on in faithful maze,
Far from the parent main, it boils again
Fresh into day, and all the glittering hill
Is bright with spouting rills.

Thomson appears to reject both the former theories (ll. 756-772), and then gives his answer to the whole problem by paraphrasing Pluche's theory of geological structure which collects and retains water (ll. 773-835):

Say, then, where lurk the vast eternal springs
That, like creating Nature, lie concealed
From mortal eye, yet with their lavish stores
Refresh the globe and all its joyous tribe?
O thou pervading genius, given to man
To trace the secrets of the dark abyss!
Oh! lay the mountains bare, and wide display
Their hidden structure to the astonished view;
Strip from the branching Alps their piny load,
The hugh incumbrance of horrific woods
From Asian Taurus, from Imaus stretched
Athwart the roving Tartar's sullen bounds;
Give opening Hemus to my searching eye,
And high Olympus pouring many a stream!
Oh, from the sounding summits of the north,
The Dofrine Hills, through Scandinavia rolled
To farthest Lapland and the frozen main;
From lofty Caucasus, far seen by those
Who in the Caspian and black Euxine toil;
From cold Riphaean rocks, which the wild Russ
Believes the stony girdle of the world;
And all the dreadful mountains wrapt in storm
Whence wide Siberia draws her lonely floods;
Oh, sweep the eternal snows! Hung o'er the deep,
That ever works beneath his sounding base,
Bid Atlas, propping heaven, as poet's feign,
His subterranean wonders spread! Unveil
The miny caverns, blazing on the day,

Of Abyssinia's cloud-compelling cliffs,
And of the bending Mountains of the Moon!
O'ertopping all these giant-sons of earth,
Let the dire Andes, from the radiant Line
Stretched to the stormy seas that thunder round
The Southern Pole, their hideous deeps unfold!
Amazing scene! Behold! the glooms disclose!
I see the rivers in their infant beds!
Deep, deep I hear them labouring to get free!
I see the leaning strata, artful ranged;
The gaping fissures, to receive the rains,
The melting snows, and ever-dripping fogs.
Strowed bibulous above I see the sands,
The pebbly gravel next, the layers then
Of mingled moulds, of more retentive earths,
The guttered rocks and mazy-running clefts,
That, while the stealing moisture they transmit,
Retard its motion, and forbid its waste.
Beneath the incessant weeping of these drains,
I see the rocky siphons stretched immense,
The mighty reservoirs, of hardened chalk
Or stiff compacted clay capacious formed:
O'erflowing thence, the congregated stores,
The crystal treasures of the liquid world,
Through the stirred sands a bubbling passage burst,
And, welling out around the middle steep
Or from the bottoms of the bosomed hills
In pure effusion flow. United thus,
The exhaling sun, the vapour-burdened air,
The gelid mountains, that to rain condensed
These vapours in continual current draw,
And send them o'er the fair-divided earth
In bounteous rivers to the deep again,
A social commerce hold, and firm support
The full-adjusted harmony of things.

How does such a passage relate to The Seasons as a whole? I obtain my answer to this from at least four sources: (1) the segment of the "Argument" to Autumn mentioned above; (2) the excerpts from Addison and Johnson; (3) Thomson's final eight lines; and (4) in a statement of Coleridge's which we will look at in a moment. All the detail above parallels the physico-theological (and the

Shaftesburyian) theme of natural and social harmony, as well as the idea of seeking to understand the Eternal through both the vast and the minute in nature. The vocabulary continues to suggest the natural sublime: "ceaseless", "infinitely", "horrid", "vast eternal", "dark abyss", "astonished view", "dreadful", "hideous deeps", and "bounteous". Thomson's imaginative view of the "hideous deeps" reflects another typical aspect of his art: the action keeps building up until a succession of images eventually comes together to form the total scene. This is in evidence particularly towards the end of the passage. The use of "Oh!", "Behold", and the repetition of "I see" and "Deep, deep" serve to heighten the scene. In order to create an image of vast, sweeping space, in addition to a more varied rhythmical effect, Thomson employs Milton's technique of working into his description a catalogue of proper nouns (ll. 781-795).[20] Any consideration of this long passage in relation to The Seasons as a whole inevitably reminds one of Coleridge's comment that

> whatever specific import we attach to the word, poetry, there will be found involved in it, as a necessary consequence, that a poem of any length neither can be, or ought to be, all poetry. Yet if an harmonious whole

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[20] See Paradise Lost, Book III, ll. 431-38.

> is to be produced, the remaining parts must be preserved in keeping with the poetry; and this can be no otherwise effected than by such a studied selection and artificial arrangement, as will partake of one, though not a peculiar property of poetry. And this again can be no other than the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at, whether colloquial or written.[21]

Thomson's blank-verse rhetoric - his skill in delineating the energies of the deep - creates the effect of which Coleridge speaks. His heightened dramatization of the forces of nature excite a "continuous and equal attention". This same passage of Thomson's above provides a good illustration of what I have been attempting to demonstrate in this thesis. Thomson's poetry shows a high degree of integration and assimilation of philosophical, religious, scientific, and, as we shall see in the last chapter, socio-political ideas. In the case above we see the integration of raw materials of science as part of the process of arriving at an original poetic view of nature.

Marjorie Hope Nicolson's Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory has adequately demonstrated that the new philosophy and science, especially the geological dilemma, and works such as Burnet's Sacred Theory, led eighteenth-century poets to become more and more interested in

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[21] Biographia Literaria, ed. Shawcross, II, ch. XIV, 11.

mountains. Thomson is part of this new trend, as we have just seen, but I wish to emphasize that his concern with mountains is not primarily "rationalistic":

> Now, by the cool declining year condensed,
> Descend the copious exhalations, checked
> As up the middle sky unseen they stole,
> And roll the doubling fogs around the hill.
> No more the mountain, horrid, vast, sublime,
> Who pours a sweep of rivers from his sides,
> And high between contending kingdoms rears
> The rocky long division, fills the view
> With great variety; but, in a night
> Of gathering vapour, from the baffled sense
> Sinks dark and dreary. Thence expanding far,
> The hugh dusk gradual swallows up the plain:
> Vanish the woods: the dim-seen river seems,
> Sullen and slow, to roll the misty wave.
> .....
> Indistinct on earth,
> Seen through the turbid air, beyond the life
> Objects appear, and, wildered, o'er the waste
> The shepherd stalks gigantic; till the last,
> Wreathed dun around, in deeper circles still
> Successive closing, sits the general fog
> Unbounded o'er the world, and, mingling thick,
> A formless grey confusion covers all.
> (Autumn, ll. 707-20, and 724-31)

It would be difficult to find a better description of mountain and plain obscured by fog. An atmosphere of bafflement, dreariness, and oppression is created by a carefully chosen diction. The reader is startled by the shepherd "stalking gigantic" out of the fog. This is but another example of the subtle manner in which Thomson relates man to his surroundings. There is a sort of universality about the image of the shepherd in the fog - a recognition of a mystical union of man and nature that looks forward to Wordsworth.

Earlier in this chapter the statement was advanced that much scientific detail sought for its own sake in poetry may be inappropriate if its purpose is not immediately apparent. Furthermore, the scientific thought should be familiar to at least the more educated. Thomson makes use of scientific materials to create images that are sometimes quite original. Take this account of osmosis and photosynthesis, for example:

> By thee the various vegetative tribes,
> Wrapt in a filmy net and clad with leaves,
> Draw the live ether and imbibe the dew.
> By thee disposed into congenial soils,
> Stands each attractive plant, and sucks, and swells
> The juicy tide, a twining mass of tubes.
> At thy command the vernal sun awakes
> The torpid sap, detruded to the root
> By wintry winds, that now in fluent dance
> And lively fermentation mounting spreads
> All this innumerous-coloured scene of things.
> (Spring, ll. 561-71)

His description of the winter frost is of a similar nature:

> What art thou, frost? and whence are thy keen
> stores
> Derived, thou secret all-invading power,
> Whom even the illusive fluid cannot fly?
> Is not thy potent energy, unseen,
> Myriads of little salts, or hooked, or shaped
> Like double wedges, and diffused immense
> Through water, earth, and ether? Hence at eve,
> Steamed eager from the red horizon round,
> With the fierce rage of Winter deep suffused,
> An icy gale, oft shifting, o'er the pool
> Breathes a blue film, and in its mid-career
> Arrests the bickering stream.
> (Winter, ll. 714-25)

These passages show that natural history may, if the proper discrimination is exercised, be profitable sources of

aesthetic qualities. In determining the degree to which Thomson has achieved these ideas or qualities, we must be wary of allowing our own a priori framework or assumptions concerning the function of the poet to control our thinking entirely.[22] Is it not fair to assume that there is a multiplicity of poetic criteria? McKillop says that the material of the first passage above "seems" to have come from Stephen Hale's Vegetable Staticks (1727), but this is of no great importance to us.[23] There is nothing in either of these descriptions which may not be understood by the more educated reader. Thomson's phrases - "By thee" and "At thy command" - prove that the detail of the first passage is meant to illustrate the great beauty and order which exists in the slightest and least of God's works. Thus the end to which the scientific thought is referred coincides with one of the main purposes of The Seasons as a whole.[24] Furthermore, the imagery in both passages is in keeping with our poet's usual technique of showing the changing face of nature. What we have is the dramatization of two

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[22]Robert Marsh, "The Seasons of Discrimination", MP, LXIV (February, 1967), 250, Note.

[23]McKillop, op. cit., p. 55.

[24]See also Summer, ll. 287-317.

distinct natural processes. In each case the scene keeps building up until in the final two lines we see the completed image. The two completed images are, first of all, the new and multi-coloured landscape of spring; and secondly, the sort of universal rigidity caused by the frost throughout nature. Although Thomson's poetry exemplifies mainly the eighteenth-century conception of imagination - the ideas of Addison and Johnson, for instance - there is somewhat of the later notion of poetic imagination, the transformational quality, recognized by Hazlitt when he says that, "Nature in his descriptions is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself."[25]

In Chapter II we saw the aesthetic implications of Shaftesbury's cosmology. He conceives of God as the Supreme Artist and nature as a work of art. This implies a creative process going on in nature; therefore any imitation of nature must be regarded as creation. It is possible that this accounts partly for Thomson's interest in details of geology, geography, botany, Newtonian science, and even meteorology:

> Behold, slow-settling o'er the lurid grove
> Unusual darkness broods, and, growing, gains
> The full possession of the sky, surcharged
> With wrathful vapour, from the secret beds
> Where sleep the mineral generations drawn.
> Thence nitre, sulphur, and the fiery spume
> Of fat bitumen, steaming on the day,

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[25] "On Thomson and Cowper", Lectures on the English Poets in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. Howe, V, 87.

> With various-tinctured trains of latent flame,
> Pollute the sky, and in yon baleful cloud,
> A reddening gloom, a magazine of fate,
> Ferment; till, by the touch etherial roused,
> The dash of clouds, or irritating war
> Of fighting winds, while all is calm below,
> They furious spring.
>
> (Summer, ll. 1103-16)

In this pseudo-scientific description of lightning, Thomson achieves an atmosphere of gloom. We feel we are present as the storm whips itself up into a fury, but the point is that he does this in spite of the scientific detail.

The eighteenth-century poet may look at the world in terms of symbols, but his set of symbols must be in direct relation to what may be investigated empirically. For instance, the poet may bury himself in the bowels of the earth, or range the solar system in an attempt to achieve the symbol of the natural sublime,

> But in an age of science the world can no longer be looked at as a set of symbols, standing for things outside the world. . . . The world is poetical intrinsically and what it means is simply itself. Its significance is the enormous mystery of its existence and of our awareness of that existence.[26]

Thomson's work displays the intrinsic poetry of the world. More than anything else he is a poet, and contemporary science and philosophy are important for him simply because they give him all the more reason to rejoice at the beauties

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[26] Aldous Huxley, Literature and Science (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 111.

of the natural world.

2

Thomson's desire to demonstrate poetically the principle of plenitude, and - by way of contrast with her milder aspects - the apparent evil and ugliness of nature, leads him into descriptions of vegetation, animal life, various earth processes, and climatic conditions of the tropics. Most of this material is found in the appropriate "View of Summer in the torrid zone" in Summer. He writes of

> The small close-lurking minister of fate,
> Whose high-concocted venom through the veins
> A rapid lightning darts, arresting swift
> The vital current. Formed to humble man,
> (ll. 908-11)

along with the terror

> Of roaring winds and flame and rushing floods.
> In wild amazement fixed the sailor stands.
> Art is too slow. By rapid fate oppressed,
> His broad-winged vessel drinks the whelming tide,
> Hid in the bosom of the black abyss.
> (ll. 996-1000)

Thomson puts his whole heart into his subject and we feel his enthusiasm. At one moment the imagination is filled with an image of the "infuriate hill" shooting its "pillared flame"; the next, with that of the "expanding earthquake". Much of the poet's material is drawn from books on physical geography, or from travel literature, but he heightens it with an emotional response.

One of the most desirable features of the poetic process is the contrasting of images. Because of its cyclical pattern, there is much evidence of this in The Seasons. We have observed how Thomson also contrasts happiness and sorrow, good and evil, the beautiful and the sublime (there is, one must remember, sometimes quite a difference between the two), and benevolence and cruelty. Related to this technique is his method of structural juxtaposition of description and moral reflection. The next chapter will deal with the contrasting notions of primitivism and progress, and liberty and oppression. There is a definite relationship between contrast and emotion:

> Contrast is one of the most powerful of those laws by which the relations of our ideas and feelings, and the current of thought in the mind, are regulated. Nature operates, by means of this principle, many of her most masterly effects on the human heart.[27]

If such a feature is related to the emotions or affections, in short, has a psychological effect on the reader, it is, therefore, artistically relevant. By way of contrast with what he refers to as the "soft scenes" of nature, Thomson's poetry illustrates John Dennis' sources of spirit, passion, and fire in poetry. These include gods,

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[27] Robert Heron, "A Critical Essay on The Seasons," The Seasons (Perth, 1793), p. 9, quoted by Marsh, op. cit., p. 241.

lions and tigers, demons, spirits and souls of men departed, inundations, earthquakes, volcanoes, tempests, raging seas, and pestilence.[28] Sometimes the equinoctial rains and tropical sun breed putrefaction:

> then wasteful forth
> Walks the dire power of pestilent disease.
> A thousand hideous fiends her course attend,
> Sick nature blasting, and to heartless woe
> And feeble desolation, casting down
> The towering hopes and all the pride of man:
> Such as of late at Carthagena quenched
> The British fire. You, gallant Vernon, saw
> The miserable scene; you, pitying, saw
> To infant-weakness sunk the warrior's arm;
> Saw the deep-racking pang, the ghastly form,
> The lip pale-quivering, and the beamless eye
> No more with ardour bright; you heard the groans
> Of agonizing ships from shore to shore,
> Heard, nightly plunged amid the sullen waves,
> The frequent corse, while, on each other fixed
> In sad presage, the blank assistants seemed
> Silent to ask whom fate would next demand.
> (Summer, ll. 1034-51)

For this account of the pestilence destroying British troops at Carthagena Thomson is indebted to the General Geography of Verenius.[29] The brilliant visualization is enhanced by the poet's ability to make the reader feel the effects which the situation would have on the hearer or spectator. You, the reader, experience the effect on the admiral of the bodies hitting the water.

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[28] The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (in two volumes, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939-43), I, 339, 348-51, 361.

[29] McKillop, op. cit., pp. 161-63.

There is a similar effect from the description of the desert sandstorm for which Thomson also draws on Verenius.[30] The scene is built up by means of a series of rapidly moving images and climaxed by a comprehensive view of the silent, buried caravan:

> Nor stop the terrors of these regions here.
> Commissioned demons oft, angels of wrath,
> Let loose the raging elements. Breathed hot
> From all the boundless furnace of the sky,
> And the wide glittering waste of burning sand,
> A suffocating wind the pilgrim smites
> With instant death. Patient of thirst and toil,
> Son of the desert! even the camel feels,
> Shot through his withered heart, the fiery blast.
> Or from the black-red ether, bursting broad,
> Sallies the sudden whirlwind. Straight the sands,
> Commoved around, in gathering eddies play;
> Nearer and nearer still they darkening come;
> Till, with the general all-involving storm
> Swept up, the whole continuous wilds arise;
> And by their noon-day fount dejected thrown,
> Or sunk at night in sad disastrous sleep,
> Beneath descending hills the caravan
> Is buried deep. In Cairo's crowded streets
> The impatient merchant, wondering, waits in vain,
> And Mecca saddens at the long delay.
> (Summer, ll. 959-79)

Thomson's deity is for the most part a "smiling" one, in keeping with the general Shaftesburyian optimism of his poetry; but he also shows the vastness, power, and terror of deity. As we have already mentioned, his subject matter parallels Dennis' sources of the sublime in poetry. "The true source of the Sublime, for Dennis, was in religion",

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[30] McKillop, op. cit., pp. 161-63.

writes Marjorie Hope Nicolson.[31] Among Dennis' list of causes of the sublime were "Gods" and "Demons". The introduction to the passage above incorporates these ideas, or at least the traditional idea that storms and related phenomena are punishments imposed upon a sinful mankind by a God of vengeance.[32] Thomson does not merely versify his source; his descriptions usually include some measure of human interest. The effective solemnity of the final line above provides, in addition, an appropriate perspective.

In the final edition of The Seasons in particular

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[31] Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, p. 281. See also in relation to Thomson's use of the "sublime" a letter to David Mallet in which he suggests the following for Mallet's Excursion: "You ought to leave no great Scene unvisited: Eruptions, Earthquakes, the Sea wrought into a horrible Tempest, . . . Sublimity must be the Characteristic of your Peice." (James Thomson (1700-1748) Letters and Documents, ed. A. D. McKillop (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1958), p. 40.)

[32] Such an idea, of course, conflicts with Shaftesbury's notion that provocation, offence, anger, revenge, malice, or "interest opposite" have no place in the Deity or Universal Being. The Deity intends everything for the general good, or the good of the whole, which for Shaftesbury is one and the same with private good. The traditional idea of the god of vengeance which appears at the beginning of the lines above is but a further example of Thomson's tendency not to follow any particular doctrine rigidly. He is concerned only with theology above so far as it enforces the "sublimity" of the scene to follow, as I have indicated in connection with Dennis.

Thomson expands, varies, and assimilates his materials.[33] For the description of the wild animals of Mauritania, in Summer, he draws on John Harris' Travels. The original version of the passage is given in the notes to the Robertson edition of Thomson's works. In the final revision he infuses more emotion to express the horror felt at the roaring of leopards, hyenas, and lions:

> From the pirate's den,
> Or stern Morocco's tyrant fang escaped,
> The wretch half wishes for his bonds again;
> While, uproar all, the wilderness resounds
> From Atlas eastward to the frighted Nile.
> (ll. 934-38)

Thomson thus creates a brief moment of minor drama by presenting man in conflict with a challenging aspect of nature. After creating an atmosphere of fear and solitariness in connection with the landscape and animals of foreign lands, he fuses material which could quite probably be drawn from Harris' Travels and Defoe's Robinson Crusoe:

> Unhappy he! who, from the first of joys,
> Society, cut off, is left alone
> Amid this world of death! Day after day,
> Sad on the jutting eminence he sits,
> And views the main that ever toils below;
> Still fondly forming in the farthest verge,
> Where the round ether mixes with the wave,
> Ships, dim-discovered, dropping from the clouds;

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[33] Horace E. Hamilton, "James Thomson's Seasons : Shifts in the Treatment of Popular Subject Matter", ELH: A Journal of English Literary History [hereafter cited as ELH] , XV (June, 1948), 110-21.

> At evening, to the setting sun he turns
> A mournful eye, and down his dying heart
> Sinks helpless; while the wonted roar is up,
> And hiss continual through the tedious night.
> (Summer, ll. 939-50)

Thomson imagines the castaway's use of imagination and expresses the idea with apt alliteration. The image of ships "dropping from the clouds" is illustrative of his originality of expression. Despite his particularization, Thomson stays in line with the major artistic attitude of his age, since in the case above, Defoe's Crusoe becomes a "universalized castaway".[34]

Perhaps scholarship has made Thomson out to be more derivative than he actually is. His scientific-geographical source materials are carefully assimilated and humanized, and thus create a unique imagery and atmosphere.

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[34] Ibid., p. 121.

CHAPTER V:

NOSTALGIC PROGRESSIVISM AND A MYTH OF LIBERTY

'Long in the barbarous heart the buried seeds
Of freedom lay, for many a wintry age;...'

Liberty, Pt. III, ll. 539-40

With the exception of two or three other major poems of Thomson, our discussion so far has dealt mainly with The Seasons. I have attempted to display the poetical aspects of the work as a whole, as contrasted with an atomistic view. In other words, an out-of-context consideration of the poetical significance of its materials has been avoided.

At the beginning of this paper the word "ideas" (philosophical, scientific, religious, etc.) was mentioned in such a way as to imply a deliberate contrast in meaning with phrases like "poetical ideas", "literary ideas", or "aesthetic qualities". This was mainly for purposes of simplification and convenience. However, very few of the philosophical, scientific, and religious "ideas" mentioned above verge on non-aesthetic concepts, or fail to arouse in us feelings and attitudes. Our subject is essentially that of the relationship of literature, in this case in connection with Thomson, and such ideas as have traditionally aroused the feelings. Examples would be those ideas of men's relation to external nature, the Deity, and to one another. It is with the latter example - men's relation to one another, their place in society, social and political organization - that we shall be concerned in this chapter.

The ideas of primitivism and progress in Thomson

are not so unresolved, or such a flaw, as they have sometimes been regarded. As a matter of fact, more than anything else they help illustrate his poetic technique. This whole question will be dealt with in the first section of this chapter.

There is nothing profound about the political system advanced in Thomson's Liberty. The poem contains a system of morals based on the writings of Shaftesbury, but its motif is not the systematic explication of Shaftesburyian philosophy or morality. I wish to show how and why Thomson makes use of Shaftesbury's ideas. George Boas, René Wellek, and Austin Warren agree that, "the intellectual content of most poetry . . . is usually much exaggerated".[1] The ideas expressed in most poems are generally quite familiar, and seldom does a true artist attempt to advance doctrinal or detailed philosophical statement. For instance, poems usually deal with such subjects as love, death, nature, admiration of or aversion from modern society, and love of one's country. Thomson's Liberty is a poem about liberty, patriotism, social love, and a belief in the necessity of these for art, industry or social progress.

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[1] Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p. 110.

Despite the "commonplaceness" of many of the subjects of poetry, however, such subjects are sometimes treated with a considerable degree of idealism and depth. Moreover, in order to balance the opinion of Wellek and Warren, it is perhaps important to keep in mind the statement of Lionel Trilling's that, "The aesthetic effect of intellectual cogency, I am convinced, is not to be slighted."[2] In Liberty Thomson enforces the aspects of the poems mentioned above with classical and contemporary allusions and references, along with a mixture of diluted philosophical ideas (Whig socio-political philosophy; Shaftesburyian ethics). Whereas in The Seasons he is concerned mainly with the "problems" of nature, fate, and religion, in Liberty he deals more with what Rudolf Unger would call problems of man and society.[3] It is a unique poetic expression of Thomson's attitude towards life and liberty - an expression involving the assimilation of Lockian Whig politics, Shaftesburyian ethics, and Gothic origins of liberty. The word "Gothic" is used here in the sense of "primitivistic". It is meant to describe the seeds of liberty, the natural love of freedom, buried for a long

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[2]Lionel Trilling, "The Meaning of a Literary Idea", in his The Liberal Imagination (first published in 1950; New York: The Viking Press, 1951), p. 291.

[3]Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p. 115.

time in the hearts of the fierce northern peoples. The major fault of the poem may be its great length. It ought to be studied in light of the subject-matter and poetic technique of Thomson's work as a whole. The second section of this last chapter will attempt to show how political theory, history, ethics, and contemporary events are assimilated in Liberty.

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The poets of Thomson's day harped much on the blessings of trade and commerce. For the first time in history Britain was going through a period of increasing luxury and progress. But the age-old tradition of the virtues of the simple life according to nature, in literature if not in practice, was dying hard - never really died. Why? The growth of new philosophic and scientific theory, the economic growth of an industrial civilization, ugliness and complexity, economic inequality, and political corruption, "lent at times a heightened appeal to the primitivist's picture of the life of the child of nature."[4] Since one of the great themes of the eighteenth century was that which Tillyard goes so far as to call the "myth" of retirement (See E. M. W. Tillyard's

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[4]Lois Whitney, Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century (first published in 1934; New York: Octagon Books, 1965), p. xviii.

Some Mythical Elements in English Literature, ch.V), it is not surprising that Thomson occasionally proceeds along a similar vein in his descriptive-contemplative Seasons. What has sometimes perplexed critics is the fact that Thomson juxtaposes with his primitivistic attitude equally ardent praise for the so-called progressive aspects of the Augustan Age. In addition to understanding clearly the fact that Thomson is influenced in his attitude and technique by Virgil, we ought to make use of the sociological approach. This will help us realize that our poet has set up, consciously or unconsciously, an aesthetic tension between two very prevalent attitudes of his age.

Before going any further, however, it is necessary to define what we mean by primitivism. For purposes of convenience scholars speak of several different kinds of primitivism. We have "chronological" primitivism; "cultural" primitivism; and "hard" and "soft" primitivism (both aspects of cultural primitivism). Here is how Lovejoy and Boas define "chronological" and "cultural" primitivism:

> Chronological primitivism is one of the many answers which may be and have been given to the question: What is the temporal distribution of good, or value, in the history of mankind, or, more generally, in the entire history of the world? It is, in short, a kind of philosophy of history, a theory, or a customary assumption, as to the time—past or present or future—at which the most excellent condition of human life,

> or the best state of the world in general, must be supposed to occur.[5]

> Cultural primitivism is the discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it. It is the belief of men living in a relatively highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or in all respects is a more desirable life.[6]

It is important to remember that cultural primitivists have always existed, and that many of them have felt that the simple life for which they long has at one time or another been lived. It is in this way that cultural primitivism fuses somewhat with chronological primitivism. For his model of excellence and happiness the cultural primitivist takes existing primitive or "savage" peoples. He is more concerned with the present than the chronological primitivist; with people living at some considerable distance from the society to whom the primitivist is preaching.

Primitivism is usually reflected in poetry as a pessimistic, emotional nostalgia - an idyllic day-dream - rather than as propaganda, although it may, and has been, used for the latter purpose. There is no conflict - at

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[5] Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity (first published 1935; New York: Octagon Books, 1965), p. 1.

[6] Ibid., p. 7.

least not in an artistic sense - in Thomson's employment of the ideas of primitivism and progress. This shall be elaborated on further when we come to examine the relevant passages. In connection with poetry Lovejoy and Boas call the attitude in question "sentimental" primitivism, as distinguished from "practical" primitivism. They continue:

> But the one naturally shades off into the other; a mood of intense dissatisfaction with some or all the characteristics of the civilized life of one's own time will obviously produce in some minds a hope and an endeavor to put an end to them. Thus, as has already been remarked, primitivism need not be, and often has not been, hostile to a certain faith in progress.[7]

The latter part of the above statement especially should be kept in mind in any interpretation of primitivism in Thomson.

Thomson's subject matter involving primitivism and progress is partially explained by his words in the Preface to the second edition of Winter (1726) already mentioned. He says that the "Works of Nature" awaken the "philosophical Reflection" and the "moral Sentiment". He goes on in that document to explain that it was Virgil's "Devotion to the Works of Nature" which inspired that poet to write his Georgics. It is because Thomson's Seasons is of a special "kind" - a descriptive-contemplative poem using Virgil's Georgics as a model - that he mixes

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[7] Ibid., p. 16.

description with morality, patriotism, primitivism and progress. It is not so much the underlying thought of The Seasons, the philosophical aspect of the poem, that is derived from Virgil; it is for the structure of his poem and certain thematic materials and explicit references (e.g. the exaltation of agriculture; the fishing section; the practical advice on destroying insects; and, of course, the theme of primitivism and progress) that Thomson relies on the Georgics (and to some extent De Rerum Natura of Lucretius).[8] We must now turn to the poetry of primitivism and progress.

Early in Spring Thomson launches into praise of the Golden Age:

> The first fresh dawn that waked the gladdened race
> Of uncorrupted man, nor blushed to see
> The sluggard sleep beneath its sacred beam;
> 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.
> Meantime the song went round; and dance and sport,
> Wisdom and friendly talk successive stole
> Their hours away; while in the rosy vale
> Love breathed his infant sighs, from anguish free,
> And full replete with bliss—save the sweet pain
> That, inly thrilling, but exalts it more.
> Nor yet injurious act nor surly deed
> Was known among these happy sons of heaven;
> For reason and benevolence were law.
> Harmonious Nature too looked smiling on.
> (ll. 242-58)

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[8] John Chalker, "Thomson's Seasons and Virgil's Georgics : The Problem of Primitivism and Progress", Studia Neophilologica, XXXV (1963), 44-45.

The Shaftesburyian vocabulary which Thomson applies to the Golden Age - "reason", "benevolence", and "Harmonious Nature" - results in a society which foreshadows that described in Part V of Liberty, once liberty has been established. Following the above account of the Golden Age he goes on to mention "these iron times/ These dregs of life!":

> Now the distempered mind
> Has lost that concord of harmonious powers
> Which forms the soul of happiness; and all
> Is off the poise within: the passions all
> Have burst their bounds; and Reason, half extinct,
> Or impotent, or else approving, sees
> The foul disorder. Senseless and deformed,
> Convulsive Anger storms at large; or, pale
> And silent, settles into fell revenge.
> (Spring, ll. 275-83)

Although these lines are directed more at the decline or lack of Shaftesburyian moral harmony than at society and progress as such, they do indicate an obvious pastoral nostalgia or primitivistic attitude.

In Summer Thomson continues in this vein with a description of the fertility and luxuriance of tropical Abyssinia:

> Where palaces and fanes and villas rise,
> And gardens smile around and cultured fields,
> And fountains gush, and careless herds and flocks
> Securely stray—a world within itself,
> Disdaining all assault:
> .....
> A land of wonders! which the sun still eyes
> With ray direct, as of the lovely realm
> Enamoured, and delighting there to dwell.
> (ll. 769-73, and ll. 781-83)

Here Thomson exercises admirable control and imagination. His repetition of "and" and enumeration of various aspects of the landscape heighten the sense of luxuriance and abundance. He transfers to the images a human and intellectual life (the gardens smile, the sun appears to have become enamoured of the lovely realm) through the use of personification and simile. Later he mentions the simplicity and moral goodness of primitive man who makes his home amidst the natural abundance of South America:

> Forsaking these,
> O'er peopled plains they fair-diffusive flow
> And many a nation feed, and circle safe
> In their soft bosom many a happy isle,
> The seat of blameless Pan, yet undisturbed
> By Christian crimes and Europe's cruel sons.
> (ll. 850-55)

But there immediately follows what appears to be an incongruous passage when considered in the light of what has preceded it - in light of everything that has been quoted so far:

> But what avails this wondrous waste of wealth,
> .....
> Ill-fated race! the softening arts of peace,
> What'er the humanizing muses teach,
> The godlike wisdom of the tempered breast,
> Progressive truth, the patient force of thought,
> Investigation calm whose silent powers
> Command the world, the light that leads to Heaven,
> Kind equal rule, the government of laws,
> And all-protecting freedom which alone
> Sustains the name and dignity of man—
> These are not theirs.
> (ll. 860, 875-84)

Thus Thomson recognizes also the defects of primitive existence.

In like manner he implies a progressivist attitude in Autumn. We are shown the blessings of Industry, while at the same time a much less attractive picture of the noble savage. At first

> the sad barbarian roving mixed
> With beasts of prey; or for his acorn meal
> Fought the fierce tusky boar—a shivering wretch!
> Aghast and comfortless...
> (ll. 57-60)

but, with the development of Industry and every other "gentle art" life became more sophisticated until,

> every form of cultivated life
> In order set, protected, and inspired
> Into perfection wrought. Uniting all,
> Society grew numerous, high, polite,
> And happy.
> (ll. 109-13)

Further evidence of this apparently contradictory attitude may be seen in Winter. Thomson describes in detail two groups of northern primitive peoples, one almost immediately following the other, but attributes a different set of values to each. According to him the Lapps

> Despise the insensate barbarous trade of war;
> They ask no more than simple Nature gives;
> (ll. 844-45)

furthermore, they are a

> Thrice happy race! by poverty secured
> From legal plunder and rapacious power,
> In whom fell interest never yet has sown
> The seeds of vice, whose spotless swains ne'er knew
> Injurious deed, nor, blasted by the breath
> Of faithless love, their blooming daughters woe.
> (ll. 881-86)

A study of the whole of the passage on the Lapps reveals them to be a peaceful and honest people. Thomson describes a sort of "soft" primitivism in which the environment is congenial:

> They love their mountains and enjoy their storms.
> (l. 846)

What we have is "a kind of aesthetic congruity" between the Lapps and their environment.[9] Thomson seems to be suggesting that despite their hardiness, they develop a softness of virtue and sentimental feeling towards their homeland. There is a sense of climate and human character being related. After idealizing the Lapps, Thomson proceeds to describe his second group of northern primitives, the Russians, but they are presented in an entirely different light. The poet suddenly reverts once again to anti-primitivistic values. These are the "last of men":

> Here human nature wears its rudest form.
> Deep from the piercing Season sunk in caves,
> Here by dull fires and with unjoyous cheer
> They waste the tedious gloom: immersed in furs
> Doze the gross race—nor sprightly jest, nor song,
> Nor tenderness they know,...
> (ll. 940-45)

He continues in this strain with the question:

> What cannot active government perform,
> New-moulding man?
> (ll. 950-1)

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[9] McKillop, op. cit., p. 120.

This introduces a passage in praise of Peter the Great's progressivist policies.

What is the reader supposed to make of all these apparent contradictions of attitude? First of all we ought to recall what was stated at the beginning as the aim of this discussion. Our concern is whether or not the various ideas, as employed by the poet, are constitutive and formative. How are they treated from an artistic standpoint? Are they legitimate and appropriate parts of the fabric of the poem? Thomson's method, as indicated by the obviously deliberate juxtapositions (one following immediately upon the other) of the two sets of values mentioned above, especially in Summer and Winter, does not constitute an artistic flaw in the poem. The problem of primitivism and progress is much more complex than at first appears. It has already been mentioned above that according to Lovejoy and Boas, the primitivistic attitude is not necessarily hostile to a certain faith in progress. The two are definitely related. As Thomson's treatment of this problem indicates, human beings are not always as consistent as we would sometimes like them to be. It is not really unusual for them to possess values which they cannot fully reconcile, yet they may be conscious of the contradiction - especially writers. In connection with this problem in Thomson, R. D. Havens comments that

> a writer's unequivocal assertion of a certain opinion does not preclude his holding and perhaps, more often than not, acting upon the contrary opinion.[10]

In real life, of course, our feelings and emotions are generally contradictory and fleeting. The poet objectifies these feelings and makes them permanent. Thomson obviously holds conflicting attitudes, but they are not left unresolved - at least artistically. He has chosen to write a special "kind" of poem, which makes use of classical precedent. His model has a suitable form for the expression of these partially opposing values. John Chalker's well-documented article referred to earlier has shown that Thomson finds an artistic resolution to the problem of primitivism and progress in one of his major sources, Virgil's Georgics.[11] According to him Thomson keeps the model of the Georgics firmly in mind while writing The Seasons. Lucretius and Ovid represent the "polar viewpoints" with regard to primitivism and progress. In De Rerum Natura Lucretius appears ultimately to favour the Iron Age, whereas in Ovid's Metamorphoses there is a strong leaning towards the values of the primitive life. In the Georgics there is a much more complex attitude towards these two opposing sets

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[10] Raymond D. Havens, "Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in Thomson", SP, XXIX (January, 1932), 51.

[11] Chalker, op. cit., p. 48.

of values. Both ages are contrasted by Virgil, but in such a way as to show the advantages of both. If Virgil's attitude is an ambivalent one, the ambivalence is in direct proportion to the complexity of these ideas. There is no doubt that the apparent conflict reflected in Thomson's poetry stems partly from his own peculiar make-up. But when we view his descriptions in their proper context, it is not difficult to understand his method. They do not represent a cleavage in his personality, or an artistic flaw, as much as an attempt to present, by method of contrast, the desirable and undesirable of both situations. Thomson is certainly attracted to the idea of luxuriant tropical scenery, the easy-going, carefree life of "soft" primitivism, the domain of the noble savage. In addition to the freedom, beauty, and virtue of some societies, other primitive areas, Thomson realizes, may just as easily be viewed from the standpoint of their ignorance, savagery, and grotesqueness. Life in the primitive state may just as easily be unpleasant without the intrusion of "Christian crimes and Europe's cruel sons." On the other hand, in spite of the great advances in government, civil living, commercial activities, and arts and industry, man has to be constantly on his guard to prevent the disintegration of such a state of affairs by political and religious

tyranny, war, self-interest, and internal corruption of various kinds. Thomson, like Virgil, is unable to condemn either age outright:

> Had Thomson presented contrasting passages of this kind in a straightforwardly descriptive poem they would undoubtedly have been confusing. But he is not being merely descriptive, and the whole tendency of his concern with primitivism and progress has to be seen in relation to the literary "kind" that he is fashioning. Since he has established the Georgic intentions of his work so clearly he is able to use Virgil's own resolution of the Golden/Iron Age antithesis as the basis for an attitude which might be described as that of nostalgic progressivism.[12]

Thus Thomson's treatment of the problem of primitivism and progress is for the most part literary, but he draws on classical precedent because it provides a combination of attitudes and values coherent with his own. Even a cursory reading of Thomson's passages quoted above shows the interflow of emotion and "idea" inherent in our poet's treatment of these two sets of values.

Thomson's use of contrast as a significant part of his technique was mentioned in an earlier chapter. In his essay, "The Meaning of a Literary Idea", Lionel Trilling makes a comment which further illuminates Thomson's method:

> Ideas may also be said to be generated in the opposition of ideals, and in the felt awareness of the impact of new circumstances upon old forms of feeling and estimation, in the response to the conflict between new exigencies

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[12] Chalker, op. cit., p. 53.

> and old pieties. And it can be said that a work will have what I have been calling cogency in the degree that the confronting emotions go deep, or in the degree that the old pieties are firmly held and the new exigencies strongly apprehended.[13]

This is an apt description of Thomson's handling of ideas, not only in The Seasons, but throughout his work as a whole. He proceeds by means of a sort of "aesthetic tension". In The Seasons there is the opposition of the traditional idea of natural beauty and the new concept of the sublime. The eighteenth-century sense of this term (changed somewhat from the original Longinian view) stems largely from Dennis, Shaftesbury, and Addison, for whom the sublime is related more to nature than to rhetoric. It is an effect also of the rehabilitation of nature, which, in turn, was caused by the new movements in philosophy and science. Associated more with the awe-inspiring than the beautiful, it has its own peculiar "terrible beauty". The poem contains also a kind of tension or opposition between rational (deism) and revealed (Christianity) religion; and, of course, the opposed ideals of primitivism and progress. Throughout all of Thomson's work there is a noticeable opposition between reason and superstition. Indolence, on the one hand, and Art and Industry on the other, are the opposed ideals in The Castle of Indolence. In Liberty they are the

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[13] Trilling, op. cit., p. 298.

personifications of Liberty (eighteenth-century liberalism) and Oppression (absolute monarchy, tyranny, the concept of Divine Right), with which we shall deal in the final section.

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It was pointed out in the introduction to this study, and ought to have been evident to some degree throughout, that Thomson represents a transition, both in language and subject matter, between classical and romantic literary tastes. He is very neo-classical, however, in his obvious assumption that poetry should both teach and delight. Many of his ideas, especially in the poems we are about to discuss next, show a definite relation to action and moral judgement. It is for this reason that I am going to turn to another comment of Trilling's, since it helps a great deal towards an elucidation of Britannia (1729), Rule, Britannia! (1740) and Liberty (1735-36):

> No doubt there is a large body of literature to which ideas, with their tendency to refer to action and effectiveness, are alien and inappropriate. But also much of literature wishes to give the sensations and to win the responses that are given and won by ideas, and it makes use of ideas to gain its effects, considering ideas—like people, sentiments, things, and scenes—to be indispensable elements of human life. Nor is the intention

> of this part of literature always an aesthetic one in the strict sense that Mr. Wellek and Mr. Warren have in mind; there is an abundant evidence that the aesthetic upon which the critic sets primary store is to the poet himself frequently of only secondary importance.[14]

On the other hand, despite their inclusion of historical, philosophical, and contemporary political ideas, the above-mentioned poems do show a considerable amount of literary "purity", since they are very much involved with "myth" in the sense in which this term is employed by Wellek and Warren.[15] Whereas the theme of Liberty (its actual surface meaning) is quite easy to grasp, the suitable artistic complexity is provided by a synthesis of the following:

(1) the poem's implied criticism of the Walpole administration and tone of opposition;

(2) a doctrine of socio-political progress which provides a parallel to the poet's ideas on spiritual progression;

(3) a continuance of the primitivistic element; in this case in the form of the Gothic origin of modern liberty;

(4) Shaftesburyian ethics;

(5) rational religion.

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[14] Trilling, op. cit., p. 289.

[15] Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p. 191.

A very brief summary of the political dissension in England during Thomson's poetical career is sufficient to help one better appreciate part of his motive in writing Britannia and Liberty. The First Minister was Sir Robert Walpole, who had his hands full with the hot-tempered George II. Indeed the only way he could influence him to any substantial degree was through the ambitious Queen Caroline. Walpole's pacific policy angered patriots like Thomson. They imagined that this affected Britain from the standpoint of honour, and hindered her commercial interests overseas. Walpole's domestic policy seemed to favour the strengthening of the Hanoverian dynasty and the feathering of his own nest. The extreme use of bribery made his administration unpopular. His jealousy of up-and-coming young politicians drove many ambitious, though brilliant, men into the opposition; that is, they sided with Frederick, Prince of Wales, who, following a quarrel with his father, became the official figure of Opposition. During the long time it took to overthrow Sir Robert the following prominent men were numbered among the Opposition: Lord Bolingbroke, Lord Chesterfield, William Pulteney, Lord Cobham, George Lyttelton, Richard and George Grenville, and William Pitt.

Sir Robert made the mistake of neglecting men

of letters, an advantage which the Opposition seized upon quickly. Thus it engaged the support of men like Thomson, who supported it partly out of conviction, partly out of necessity. The poet was not wealthy by any means and accordingly sought patrons; but he was a patriot and firm believer in liberty, as well as being interested in trade and commerce. He believed it was the duty of the government to support and encourage the arts for which Walpole appeared to have little time. For reasons such as these Thomson felt justified in criticizing the First Minister at every opportunity. Thomson, however, was no skilful, blunt, merciless satirist in the manner of his friend Pope. His views are voiced more quietly and obliquely; they are interwoven with the myth of liberty set forth in Britannia and Liberty.

In Britannia (1729) there is a denouncement of the faint-heartedness of Walpole in face of Spanish insult:

> And should the big redundant flood of trade,
> In which ten thousand thousand labours join
> Their several currents, till the boundless tide
> Rolls in a radiant deluge o'er the land;
> Should this bright stream, the least inflected, point
> Its course another way, o'er other lands
> The various treasure would resistless pour,
> Ne'er to be won again; its ancient tract
> Left a vile channel, desolate, and dead,
> With all around a miserable waste.
> (ll. 218-27)

The following passage from Liberty bears the tone of the Opposition and is no doubt aimed at the Walpole administration:

> 'Should then the times arrive (which Heaven avert!)
> That Britons bend unnerved, not by the force
> Of arms, more generous and more manly, quelled,
> But by corruption's soul-dejecting arts,
> Arts impudent and gross! by their own gold,
> In part bestowed to bribe them to give all;
> (Part V, ll. 304-9)

and at one point appears a hint to pursue a justly agressive foreign policy:

> Or, should affronting war
> To slow but dreadful vengeance rouse the just,
> Unfailing fields of freemen I behold
> That know with their own proper arm to guard
> Their own blest isle against a leaguing world.
> (Part V, ll. 629-33)

The notion of heroic virtue, public spirit, or social love (liberty, freedom) versus luxury, corruption, or selfishness (oppression, tyranny) - the underlying idea of the system of liberty traced by Thomson from the Greek and Romans - is applied to Britain, especially in Parts IV and V of Liberty. The implied criticism in lines such as those above serve to enforce his ideal theory of liberty. In other words, the ideals presented in Britannia (a sort of "abstract" of the later and more elaborate poem) and in Liberty create a poetical vehicle on which ride also gibes at the Walpole

administration.[16] Thus Thomson's criticism of government policy is presented as an integral part of the dramatic-narrative structure of Britannia and Liberty.

A fact which ought to be mentioned here in connection with Liberty, and which has already been given some attention by Basil Willey, is that by Thomson's age the acquisitive impulses had been liberated, since they were thought natural, and thus laissez-faire was given a free rein: "Natural Law, sanctioning liberty and progress, was to be the basis of the modern liberal-bourgeois State."[17] The Age of Enlightenment in England with its theories of the universe and man's mind, this comparatively peaceful and prosperous era, gave rise to a sort of conservative optimism, partially sparked also by the optimistic philosophy of Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke. We must be careful, however, in overestimating the extent of the optimism and feeling that "whatever is, is right": this was mainly associated with the "intellectuals" and commercial classes - those who kept abreast of the new movements in philosophy, science, and the arts. Then again, it is ironic that out of these attitudes there emerged another situation. The notion that all ill is

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[16] See also Liberty, Pt. I, ll. 75-81; Pt. IV, ll. 820-39, p. 381; and Pt. IV, ll. 930-46, p. 384.

[17] Willey, op. cit., p. 18.

ultimately good; whatever is, is right; and the concept of the Great Chain of Being all curiously enough point to what Willey refers to as "a gospel of hopelessness."[18] All of these things imply that improvement is impossible, things are "fixed", one must be contented with one's lot, the status quo is as it should be. Of course there was a revolt against this sort of attitude as the century progressed. The "conservative optimism" gave way to a more "liberal optimism", the idea that whatever is is not necessarily right, or a doctrine of indefinite progress towards perfection. Thomson's ideas seem to be more a part of this transition than anything else.

Before moving on let us briefly remind ourselves what we have set out to do. Despite the fact that we have taken an approach that is partly historical, our main concern is to study the patterns and interrelation of images and ideas within a poem, and sometimes between poems, in order to illuminate their part in the structure of these poems. We wish to see how various "ideas" are incorporated into the very texture of the work and lead to the poet's true meaning - which is in a sense "ideal", since all poetry is essentially ideal - so that our imaginative life becomes in some measure expanded. What we are dealing with in a poem such as Liberty is not history,

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[18] Willey, op. cit., p. 55.

but a sort of essence and abridgement of history. It is for these reasons that I wish to stress the mythical aspects of Thomson's Britannia, Rule, Britannia!, and Liberty. As I hope will be shown in the next few pages, Thomson creates a myth of liberty which is in one sense very typical of his age, yet in another sense unique, since he expands and strengthens it with Shaftesburyian ethics, allusions to contemporary politics, and rational religion. His views of liberty and the process of history are in this way very much related to ideas contained in The Seasons and his other poems.

In the broad sense "myth" deals with "origins" and "destinies". It is a method by which society attempts to teach its different generations of members about man's nature and destiny. One might conceive of myth as, "like poetry, a kind of truth or equivalent of truth, not a competitor to historic or scientific truth but a supplement."[19]

When we apply this to Thomson we see that the prominent motif of Liberty (and to some extent Britannia and Rule, Britannia!) is to display metaphorically the timeless ideal, Liberty. While no doubt this ideal as presented by Thomson will never become historic fact, in order to satisfy his personal feelings and fulfil what he

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[19] Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p. 191.

considers to be the function of poetry, its complete achievement must be presented partly as a future historical event.

In his Some Mythical Elements in English Literature, Tillyard has a chapter on the myth of liberty in the eighteenth century.[20] He devotes part of his discussion to how the myth is embodied in Thomson's Liberty. I am much indebted to him for some of the ideas which follow. It is not necessary to summarize all of what he has to say on this topic, but simply to mention those aspects relevant to the present discussion. The three large general principles of the myth are as follows: first, that freedom encourages commerce, and vice versa; second, that a free society is most conducive to the arts; and, finally, the Augustan doctrine of progress.

At the close of his book on the Spanish Armada, Garrett Mattingly mentions the mythical value of the defeat of the Armada:

> Meanwhile, as the episode of the Armada receded into the past, it influenced history in another way. Its story, magnified and distorted by a golden mist, became a heroic apologue of the defense of freedom against tyranny, an eternal myth of the victory of the weak over the strong, of the truimph of David over Goliath.[21]

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[20] Tillyard, op. cit., p. 108.

[21] Garrett Mattingly, The Armada (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), p. 401.

In the process of expressing his love for his country, the merits of devotion to the public, and his impatience over the peace-at-any price policy of the Walpole administration, Thomson makes use of this mythical element in the following fine passage from Britannia:

> 'There was a time (oh, let my languid sons
> Resume their spirit at the rousing thought!)
> When all the pride of Spain, in one dread fleet,
> Swelled o'er the labouring surge like a whole heaven
> Of clouds wide-rolled before the boundless breeze.
> Gaily the splendid armament along
> Exultant ploughed, reflecting a red gleam,
> As sunk the sun, o'er all the flaming vast;
> Tall, gorgeous, and elate; drunk with the dream
> Of easy conquest; while their bloated war,
> Stretched out from sky to sky, the gathered force
> Of ages held in its capacious womb.
> But soon, regardless of the cumbrous pomp,
> My dauntless Britons came, a gloomy few,
> With tempests black, the goodly scene deformed,
> And laid their glory waste. The bolts of fate
> Resistless thundered through their yielding sides;
> Fierce o'er their beauty blazed the lurid flame;
> And seized in horrid grasp, or shattered wide
> Amid the mighty waters, deep they sunk.
> Then too from every promontory chill,
> Rank fen, and cavern where the wild wave works,
> I swept confederate winds, and swelled a storm.
> Round the glad isle, snatched by the vengeful blast,
> The scattered remnants drove; on the blind shelve,
> And pointed rock that marks the indented shore,
> Relentless dashed, where loud the northern main
> Howls through the fractured Caledonian isles....'
> (ll. 62-89)

Following this quasi-mythical account of the defence of freedom against tyranny he proceeds with lines which illustrate the three principles of the myth of liberty mentioned above:

> Oh, Peace! thou source and soul of social life,
> Beneath whose calm inspiring influence,
> Science his views enlarges, Art refines,
> And swelling Commerce opens all her ports,
> Blest be the man divine who gives us thee!
> (ll. 122-26)

Thus freedom and peace encourage commerce, the arts, and progress generally. And again:

> May liberty,
> The light of life! the sun of humankind!
> Whence heroes, bards, and patriots borrow flame,
> Even where the keen depressive north descends,
> Still spread, exalt, and actuate your powers!
> While slavish southern climates beam in vain.
> And may a public spirit from the throne,
> Where every virtue sits, go copious forth,
> Live o'er the land! the finer arts inspire;
> Make thoughtful Science raise his pensive head,
> Blow the fresh bay, bid Industry rejoice,
> And the rough sons of lowest labour smile:
> As when, profuse of Spring, the loosened west
> Lifts up the pining year, and balmy breathes
> Youth, life, and love, and beauty o'er the world.
> (ll. 271-85)

Liberty records the history of liberty, both religious and civil, from its essential origins in Greece, down to its establishment in Rome, among the northern nations, and eventually on to Great Britain. The poet touches on the periods of decline in the reign of the Goddess Liberty along the way. The final section, "The Prospect", is important, since it shows how liberty may be maintained in Britain and strengthened by governmental support of the arts.

There are numerous examples in Liberty showing how in Thomson's system liberty, and progress in commerce

and the arts, are integrally related. This passage near the beginning of the section on "Greece" (Part II) illustrates this whole question of the association of liberty and the doctrine of progress:

> The simpler arts were all their simple wants
> Had urged to light. But instant, these supplied,
> Another set of fonder wants arose,
> And other arts with them of finer aim;
> Till, from refining want to want impelled,
> The mind by thinking pushed her latent powers,
> And life began to glow and arts to shine.
> (ll. 15-21)

In some of the most beautiful lines in Liberty Thomson describes how the arts flourished in Greece once liberty had become firmly established, illustrating once again the second of the three general principles of the liberty myth. He mentions how the Greeks eventually became interested in landscape-painting:

> while to rural life
> The softer canvas oft reposed the soul.
> There gaily broke the sun-illumined cloud;
> The lessening prospect, and the mountain blue
> Vanished in air; the precipice frowned dire;
> White down the rock the rushing torrent dashed;
> The sun shone trembling o'er the distant main;
> The tempest foamed immense; the driving storm
> Saddened the skies, and, from the doubling gloom,
> On the scathed oak the ragged lightning fell;
> In closing shades, and where the current strays,
> With peace and love and innocence around,
> Piped the lone shepherd to his feeding flock;...
> (Liberty, Pt. II, ll. 350-62)

In Part IV, "Britain", Thomson continues the association of freedom and commercial progress, of which British

overseas trade and exploration are important factors. In her progress towards Great Britain the Goddess Liberty meets the Genius of the Deep who welcomes her and exclaims:

> All my dread walks to Britons open lie.
> .....
> Still in the crook of shore the coward sail
> Till now low crept; and peddling commerce plied
> Between near joining lands. For Britons, chief,
> It was reserved, with star-directed prow,
> To dare the middle deep, and drive assured
> To distant nations through the pathless main.
> (ll. 410 and 421-26)

The Genius continues to emphasize that through her sea-power Britain can trade freely on every coast (Part IV, ll. 432-38).

With the development of the party system the rôle of poetry in politics changed. The poets sided with one party or the other and devoted their efforts to the singing of the party ideals. One of the most important things to remember about political belles lettres in the eighteenth century is that they were concerned more with principles than with personalities. Partly because of the fact that the ideals professed by the Whig party coincided with the popular moral sentiments of the age, the poets appear to have been attracted by "the psychology of Whiggism."[22] Thus Whig panegyric verse became a phase

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[22] C. A. Moore, "Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760", PMLA, XLI (June, 1926), 362.

of the growing sentimentalism which had developed early in the century. The poetry - and this is especially noticeable in Thomson - was a fusion of political and moral ideals. Moore makes the point that Thomson is "the illustration par excellence of Locke's political philosophy in verse and of British egotism."[23] Of course this Lockian influence has more to do with general principles than anything else.

In Liberty Thomson traces the progress of human freedom from earliest times and ends with events in the England of 1688-89 (Pt. IV, ll. 1115-1134). By doing this he implies that the fondest dreams of liberty have at last been realized. One might note the words of the Goddess Liberty at the end of Part IV:

> 'And now behold! exalted as the cope
> That swells immense o'er many-peopled earth,
> And like it free, my fabric stands complete,
> The palace of the laws....'
> (ll. 1177-1180)

Actually what Thomson is doing here is summarizing the beneficent effects brought about by the Revolution of 1688 and the Declaration of Rights (1689), both of which were essentially Whig measures. The glory of maritime commerce, in itself a poetical subject, appears to have

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[23] Ibid., p. 368.

been of greatest inspiration to Thomson; but in addition to reflecting the trend towards arousing the sleeping valor of the British, he also places considerable emphasis on the benevolent aspect of the Whig programme. Moore sums up the attitude as follows:

> Panegyrists saw, or professed to see, in the commercial policy the humanitarian design of ameliorating the condition of the lower classes. . . . At this juncture, to present Whiggism as a national philanthropy, supplementary to the relief of the Poor Laws and private alms and superior to either as a humanitarian expedient, was to insure it an immediate popularity with the sentimental "benevolists."[24]

As I hope to demonstrate shortly, this is possibly one of the reasons why Thomson fuses the ethics of Shaftesbury with his own theory of liberty.

Commerce as philanthropy involved not only foreign trade, but other closely related or allied industries. According to the eighteenth-century myth of liberty as exemplified in Thomson, liberty and commerce are interdependent. Thus near the beginning of Part V, "The Prospect", he mentions, as arising from the influence of the Goddess Liberty, the fact that

> The poor man's lot with milk and honey flows, (l. 6)

and later praises England as the

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[24] Ibid., p. 374.

> Great nurse of fruits, of flocks, of commerce, she!
> Great nurse of men! by thee, O Goddess, taught,...
> (Pt. V, ll. 81-2)

To go back once more to what we referred to as the three general principles of the myth of liberty, we recall that the second is that a free society is most conducive to the arts. It has already been shown how Thomson makes this point clear in Part II, "Greece". In Part V, "The Prospect", he further recommends as the last "ornament" and "finishing" of liberty a government which fosters the arts and sciences. The arts may flourish for a time under a despotic government, the Goddess says, as may be seen in the example of France, but their parent soil is in a land of liberty. Therefore:

> 'Shall Britons, by their own joint wisdom ruled
> Beneath one royal head, whose vital power
> Connects, enlivens, and exerts the whole;
> In finer arts, and public works, shall they
> To Gallia yield? yield to a land that bends,
> Depressed and broke, beneath the will of one?...'
> (ll. 441-46)

She praises Louis for his support of the arts (lines 519-23, Pt. V.) and then proceeds to drive home the notion of how much more they ought to be blooming in Britain:

> Superior still,
> How had they branched luxuriant to the skies
> In Briton planted, by the potent juice
> Of freedom swelled? Forced is the bloom of arts,
> A false uncertain spring, when bounty gives,
> Weak without me, a transitory gleam.
> (Pt. V, ll. 526-31)

Here Thomson stresses a very significant aspect of his

theory of liberty, while at the same time such a passage serves as criticism of the deficiencies in this respect of the Walpole administration.

Before concluding with the Gothic and Shaftesburyian elements of Thomson's myth, there is no better way in which to summarize the three general principles just discussed than by drawing on his famous Rule, Britannia! (1740). It is because of her freedom that Britain prospers in trade and commerce:

> To thee belongs the rural reign;
> Thy cities shall with commerce shine;
> All thine shall be the subject main,
> And every shore it circles thine.
> (ll. 22-25)

And in the last stanza he writes,

> The Muses, still with freedom found,
> Shall to thy happy coast repair:
> (ll. 27-28)

which once more associates liberty and the arts.

A significant aspect of Thomson's theory is that concerning the "Gothic" origin of modern liberty. This means that the basis of British freedom is the natural love of liberty characteristic of the fierce northern nations. Dr. Samuel Kliger writes, "The Goths, in Thomson's account, are the original democrats of the world."[25]

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[25] Samuel Kliger, "The 'Goths' in England", Modern Philology, XLIII (November, 1945), 116.

Following the decay of Roman liberty the Goddess Liberty goes north,

> And there a race of men prolific swarms,
> To various pain, to little pleasure used,
> On whom keen-parching beat Riphaean winds,
> Hard like their soil, and like their climate fierce,
> The nursery of nations!
> (Liberty, Pt. III, ll. 529-33)

She rouses these to invasion of the Empire, since

> 'Long in the barbarous heart the buried seeds
> Of freedom lay, for many a wintry age;...'
> (Liberty, Pt. III, ll. 539-40)

On her way to England she visits Scandinavia:

> There I the manly race, the parent hive
> Of the mixed kingdoms, formed into a state
> More regularly free.
> (Liberty, Pt. IV, ll. 372-4)

These northern peoples include the Scythians, Goths, Celts, Scandinavians, and the Saxons who invaded England. The warlike attitudes of the latter group, according to the myth, are balanced by a more civil side of their nature. This ancient tradition of primitive liberty is stressed by the Whig organs of Thomson's day in order to make Walpole's violations of the Constitution stand out all the more. As A. D. McKillop has shown, the Craftsman emphasizes the principles of constitutional liberty along which the early Saxon Commonwealth was organized.[26] In

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[26] A. D. McKillop, "Ethics and Political History in Thomson's Liberty", in James L. Clifford and Louis A. Landa, eds., Pope and his Contemporaries (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 224.

Thomson's words:

> Untamed
> To the refining subtleties of slaves,
> They brought a happy government along;
> Formed by that freedom which, with secret voice,
> Impartial nature teaches all her sons,
> And which of old through the whole Scythian mass
> I strong inspired.
>
> (Liberty, Pt. IV, ll. 689-95)

The notion of the Gothic origin of modern liberty was to be found readily in Temple's essay Of Heroic Virtue (1692), Molesworth's Account of Denmark (1694), and Rapin's History of England (1743), all three of which are mentioned by Thomson in the notes to Liberty.[27]

It has been mentioned so far that freedom depends on commerce, and commerce on freedom, the arts flourish best in a free society, and that the myth of liberty in Thomson also reflects the Augustan doctrine of progress and the Gothic origin of modern liberty. The final part of this section will deal with the system of ethics which Thomson fuses with the rest of his imaginative conception of liberty. Before we can understand the issue at stake, we must recall what was said in the brief summary of Shaftesburyian morality in the first section of Chapter II. In his system, physical and moral harmony are related, all part of the one harmonious whole. Thus the concept of benevolence in

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[27] Ibid., p. 223. See the notes in the Robertson edition, pp. 417, 420, and 421.

the world of social ethics is, for Shaftesbury, analogous to that of gravitation in the physical order. Benevolence, as well as being necessary for the happiness of the individual, promotes the welfare of society. He speaks of "THE natural Affections, which lead to the Good of THE PUBLICK" and "the Self-affections, which lead only to the Good of THE PRIVATE."[28] More to the point, he writes,

> And thus in the main Sum of Happiness, there is scarce a single Article, but what derives it-self from social Love, and depends immediately on the natural and kind Affections.
> (An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit, Bk. 2, Pt. 2, section 1, Characteristicks, II, 109-10)

And finally, what is of even greater relevance to our discussion here:

> THUS the Wisdom of what rules, and is FIRST and CHIEF in Nature, has made it to be according to the private Interest and Good of every-one, to work towards the general Good; which if a Creature ceases to promote, he is actually so far wanting to himself, and ceases to promote his own Happiness and Welfare. He is, on this account, directly his own Enemy: Nor can he any otherwise be good or useful to himself, than as he continues good to Society, and to that Whole of which he is himself a Part. So that VIRTUE, which of all Excellencys and Beautys is the chief, and most amiable; that which is the Prop and Ornament of human Affairs; which upholds Communitys, maintains Union, Friendship, and Correspondence amongst Men; that by which Countrys, as well as private Familys, flourish and are happy; and for want of which, every-thing comely, conspicuous, great

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[28] An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit, Bk. 2, Pt. 1, section 3, Characteristicks, II, 86-87.

> and worthy, must perish, and go to ruin; that single Quality, thus beneficial to all Society, and to Mankind in general, is found equally a Happiness and Good to each Creature in particular; and is that by which alone Man can be happy, and without which he must be miserable.
> (An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit, Bk. 2, Pt. 2, Conclusion, Characteristicks, II, 175-76)

The heroic virtue or "public zeal" exemplified by heroes and patriots at the height of liberty in ancient Greece and Rome is viewed by Thomson as social love:

> There too, by rooting thence still treacherous self,
> The public and the private grew the same.
> The children of the nursing public all,
> And at its table fed—for that they toiled,
> For that they lived entire, and even for that
> The tender mother urged her son to die.
> (Liberty, Pt. II, ll. 129-34)

These lines illustrate perfectly how, among the Athenians, "natural Affections", which lead to the good of the public, triumphed over "Self-affections". In Part III the Goddess of Liberty describes how she inspired public spirit among the Romans:

> That godlike passion! which, the bounds of self
> Divinely bursting, the whole public takes
> Into the heart, enlarged, and burning high
> With the mixed ardour of unnumbered selves—
> Of all who safe beneath the voted laws
> Of the same parent state fraternal live.
> .....
> The social charm went round,
> The fair idea, more attractive still
> As more by virtue marked; till Romans, all
> One band of friends, unconquerable grew.
> (ll. 107-12, and 117-20)

The magnanimity of Flaminius (Part III, ll. 261-317),

who turned success and conquest to generous ends by restoring to the Greeks their "countries, cities, liberties, and laws", is treated by Thomson as another example of the benevolence described above, the tendency of the Roman heroes to work towards the general good.

In Part V, "The Prospect", we continue to read of "virtue" as the basis for the preservation of his system:

> 'On virtue can alone my kingdom stand,
> On public virtue, every virtue joined.
> For, lost this social cement of mankind,
> The greatest empires by scarce-felt degrees
> Will moulder soft away, till, tottering loose,
> They prone at last to total ruin rush....'
> (ll. 93-98)

The "public virtue" of which Thomson speaks, and a few lines later refers to as "a passion for the commonweal" (l. 123), is simply an adaptation of that "VIRTUE" described in the long quotation from Shaftesbury above. Another thing to notice about lines 93-98 above is the reminder of what will happen once this social virtue declines. How did Rome lose her liberty? Social love gave way to self-love, and the situation became ripe for slavery. As Thomson puts it:

> The steel of Brutus burst the grosser bonds
> By Caesar cast o'er Rome; but still remained
> The soft enchanting fetters of the mind,
> And other Caesars rose.
> (Pt. V, ll. 202-5)

But it is in the following passage that we see Thomson's

most comprehensive expression of how to preserve his system:

> 'An active flood of universal love
> Must swell the breast. First, in effusion wide,
> The restless spirit roves creation round,
> And seizes every being; stronger then
> It tends to life, whate'er the kindred search
> Of bliss allies; then, more collected still,
> It urges human kind; a passion grown,
> At last the central parent public calls
> Its utmost effort forth, awakes each sense,
> The comely, grand, and tender. Without this,
> This awful pant, shook from sublimer powers
> Than those of self, this heaven-infused delight,
> This moral gravitation, rushing prone
> To press the public good, my system soon,
> Traverse, to several selfish centres drawn,
> Will reel to ruin—while for ever shut
> Stand the bright portals of desponding fame....'
> (Pt. V, ll. 245-61)

This is a skilful fusion of Shaftesburyian and Newtonian ideas. One notices the poet's use of the relationship of physical and moral harmony. The law of gravitation in the physical universe becomes, in the moral world, the concept of universal social love. Thus the purpose of the phrase "moral gravitation".[29]

From all this one can see that many of the ideas in Liberty are consistent with the world view which emerges from The Seasons and other earlier poems.

There is one more aspect of Thomson's myth of liberty which deserves to be mentioned. To use his own

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[29] Note similar ideas in the lines on Pythagoras in Pt. III, ll. 32-62, p. 341.

words:

> Nor be Religion, rational and free,
> Here passed in silence; whose enraptured eye
> Sees heaven with earth connected, human things
> Linked to divine:...
>
> (Liberty, Pt. IV, ll. 561-64)

Thus his system appears to provide for that same deistic attitude which we discussed in an earlier chapter.

At this point it is necessary to ask ourselves the question of how far the philosophy of Shaftesbury defines Thomson's aim. We have to be careful in our answer. Despite the echoes of Shaftesburyian thought which we have been tracing throughout the chapters above, it is important to recognize that that is exactly what they are - merely "echoes." As far as this last chapter is concerned, R. L. Brett sums up the relationship between Thomson and Shaftesbury when he writes:

> Shaftesbury's ethics appealed to him because it upheld morality as part of that beauty which animates the whole universe.[30]

Thomson incorporates Shaftesbury's ethics into his theory of liberty and progress, and because of the nature of these ethics (based as they are on Shaftesbury's philosophy of nature and the universe), the poet's ideas of liberty and progress become part of a main theme throughout all his poetry - cosmic unity and harmony. This is a good

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[30] Brett, op. cit., p. 189.

example of how "ideas" enter into literature; of what I have been attempting to demonstrate throughout this discussion. Thomson simply draws on some of the moralist's significant ideas in the process of formulating a poetical attitude towards the question of liberty. He moulds a poetical myth from divers elements: historical evidence; contemporary political events and attitudes; and Shaftesburyian ethics. When reading The Seasons and Liberty we are not reading about the world of Shaftesbury, Newton, Burnet, Locke, or anybody else, but, after all, an imaginary world created from the raw materials of their reality, a reality which Thomson shared when he did not have pen in hand. W. K. Wimsatt (Jr.) and Monroe Beardsley claim that

> We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic speaker, and if to the author at all, only by a biographical act of inference.[31]

The thoughts and attitudes expressed in Liberty may easily be attributed to Thomson, since we know enough about his life to be sure that he believed passionately in the ideals reflected in that poem. On the other hand, he universalizes all aspects of his myth by having the Goddess of Liberty

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[31] W. K. Wimsatt (Jr.) and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy", Sewanee Review, LIV (July - September, 1946), 470.

do most of the talking. One of the aesthetic canons of Thomson's day was the use of personified abstractions. Much of what Bertrand H. Bronson and Earl Wasserman have to say in their thought-provoking articles tending to defend this literary practice is applicable to Thomson.[32] He uses the device with considerable skill. Take this account of the decline of liberty in Greece spoken by the Goddess herself:

> 'Thus tame submitted to the victor's yoke
> Greece, once the gay, the turbulent, the bold;
> For every grace, and muse, and science born;
> With arts of war, of government elate;
> To tyrants dreadful, dreadful to the best;
> Whom I myself could scarcely rule: and thus
> The Persian fetters, that enthralled the mind,
> Were turned to formal and apparent chains....'
> (Liberty, Pt. II, ll. 482-89)

Vivid and startling ("Whom I myself could scarcely rule"), these lines have been justly praised.

Our realization of Thomson's allusions to Walpole's government, and his use of various source materials, may allow us to see new shades of meaning in Liberty; but we have, first of all, to read and understand it on its internal, rather than its external evidence. We still know what he means, do we not, without all this knowledge of Rapin's History, Shaftesbury's Characteristicks, and

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[32] See Bertrand H. Bronson, "Personification Reconsidered", ELH, XIV (September, 1947), 163-77; and Earl Wasserman, "The Inherent Values of Eighteenth-Century Personification", PMLA, LXV (June, 1950), 435-63.

other sources? Thus our poet makes use of these materials merely to support his theme. The important thing is that they are relevant to the poem's structure.

CHAPTER VI:

CONCLUSION

Thomson's poetry is not the simple versification of a particular system. It represents an interpretation of life, which shows an awareness of the general assumptions of several people and systems. Profoundly influenced by the rationalism coming into vogue at the beginning of the eighteenth century, he is a key figure in an age of transition. Nature is no longer viewed as satanic and hostile, but beautiful and sublime. Thomson sees nature as a spiritual and moral force in relation to man. The new philosophy and science assist the poet, provide him with a more substantial degree of artistic complexity and coherence in formulating a poetic view of man, nature, and God. Furthermore, his notions of moral, social, and political harmony are distinctly related to his view of nature and the physical universe. His passages of statement or imagery closely associated with the philosophy, theology, science, sociology, and politics of the Enlightenment must not be read out of context. Each must be studied as part of the poem as a whole. In the chapters above I have attempted to demonstrate how certain of these passages relate to motifs; how they illustrate the structural principles which emerge from these poems. Occasionally Thomson fuses ideas from various sources, or makes use of science or philosophy to create entirely original ideas, phrases, or images.

Among the most easily recognizable aspects of Thomson's poetry is the all-pervading influence of Shaftesbury's concept of the universe and his ethics. This may be seen in an early poem such as The Works and Wonders of Almighty Power. Written when he was yet a boy, it merely versifies a number of passages from Shaftesbury's Moralists. Reproducing more than assimilating, it exhibits nothing original.

As the title and structure of The Seasons suggests, Thomson is concerned with the natural harmony, order, and beauty of the works of creation. Since his intention practically coincides with that of Shaftesbury, it is natural that he turn to the moralist for ideas. The rainstorms and "soft scenes" of Spring, the feeling of love which this season inspires in the animal kingdom and amongst mankind, are all presented by Thomson as examples of nature's benevolence and harmony. These Shaftesburyian ideas are utilized in such a manner structurally as to show man as part of the total pattern of nature. Actually this is achieved by combining the notion of the Great Chain of Being with Shaftesburyian morality and feeling for nature. The digressions (the Celadon and Amelia episode in Summer; the Palemon and Lavinia story in Autumn) in The Seasons appear to be based on Shaftesbury's conception

of evil, harmony, and benevolence. As I have attempted to demonstrate, they arise naturally out of the description at hand; that is, each is appropriately related to events of the season in which it occurs.

In addition to incorporating Shaftesburyian ideas by means of structural technique, Thomson presents many of his descriptions in the language of the sublime. Shaftesbury's conception of the latter term involves an aesthetic view of the vast, the awe-inspiring, and the terrible in nature. This aspect of Thomson has been demonstrated in the second, third, and fourth chapters.

Moralistic passages such as that immediately following the death of the man in the snowstorm in Winter serve to emphasize the analogy between physical and moral harmony.

The implications of Shaftesbury's system for literary criticism are that all aspects of nature are potential sources of aesthetic delight, and that nature is a work of art created by the Supreme Artist, God. Thomson's descriptions (representing the dictum that art is imitation) attempt to reproduce this creative process going on in nature.

Thomson's indebtedness to Shaftesburyian ideas emerges as the structural principles around which The Seasons is built.

Thomson's theology, as deduced from his poetry, is somewhat eclectic, but ultimately original. Although his language is usually ostentatious, and occasionally downright pretentious, his sincerity and vision are for the most part akin to Milton. He arrives at an original view of God and the cosmos through a synthesis of ideas drawn from Christianity, Deism, Pantheism, and Pythagorean doctrine. He adopts from various sources any ideas which will lend support to the following belief evident in The Seasons. There is a Creator whose power, spirit, and benevolence are shown in nature. With this God or Spirit everything must have originated, and by his laws, physical and moral, everything continues. All aspects of the universe are therefore worthy of our observation and praise. Thomson's religious ideas stem from his view of external nature, the organization of the universe, and in this way are part of his total view, since the ethics underlying his social and political organization in Liberty are also based on his view of harmony and benevolence in nature. A Complaint on the Miseries of Life and Upon Happiness reflect, for the most part, the Calvinist doctrine the poet was taught as a child and youth. It is in The Seasons, A Hymn, The Castle of Indolence, and to a small degree in Liberty, that his deist leanings are strongly apparent.

A significant part of his theology is the frequent allusion to a process of soul refinement or progressive knowledge. I tend to view this as part of his comprehensive theory of reason and progress, which is essentially philosophical, religious, social, and political. This notion of spiritual evolution is another unifying factor in Thomson's work as a whole.

The language of the "natural sublime" evident in The Seasons is directly related to Thomson's theological conceptions, indeed results from the latter. He adopts deist terminology ("Universal Soul", "Source of Being", "Essential Presence") to more conveniently express the sublimity associated with the deity and voice his praise. Deism is employed largely as an imaginative element.

A Hymn on The Seasons is a fine example of the blending of various sources to arrive at an original vision. It is significant that the parts of the sources utilized - Shaftesbury, the latter part of the Book of Job, Psalm 148, and the hymn of praise from Paradise Lost, Book V - are all directly relevant to Thomson's religious motif: God is power and benevolence, and deserving of praise from all objects of creation.

The religious sentiment in The Castle of Indolence is a combination of orthodox Christianity and deism. The reason for the strongly orthodox element in that poem is

an artistic or literary one: he is following closely the ideas and language of Spenser.

The religious myth in Thomson's poetry evolves from various sources and has as one of its main symbols what Ernest Tuveson calls the "natural sublime".

There are numerous examples in Thomson of imagery based on ideas from Newton's Optics and Principia. In Chapter IV I have attempted to demonstrate how these ideas, indeed all the passages of scientific detail, are carefully worked into the total pattern of a poem and function as legitimate parts of that pattern. The description of the rainbow following the shower is natural in Spring. It is here that Thomson can make use of Newtonian ideas to vivify his presentation. Since Summer is described in terms of one whole summer's day, Thomson's lines on the movements of the planets and the principle of gravitation are appropriate. He seldom fails to introduce some human element. The planets remain "Firm, unremitting, matchless in their course" since creation, while the "toiling race of men" and their "laboured monuments" are continually swept away "Amid the flux of many thousand years". Thomson's use of Newtonian ideas of gravitation and the nature of light is related to his religious motif. Passages incorporating such material continue to emphasize the power, beneficence, harmony, and sublimity associated with the "all-perfect

Hand".

To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton is possibly the best example in Thomson of the humanization of science. Thomson's art is revealed in the perfect balance of emotion and scientific detail. Newton's achievements are depicted accurately and vividly, yet in a tone that expresses praise and personal loss.

Despite his prolific use of scientific ideas, Thomson's poetics are not rooted in scientific thought. On the whole there emanates from The Seasons the poet's own mood and the mood of nature. Thomson is not a poet because of science, but interested in science because he is a poet. His technique is a practical expression of the literary criticism of his age. The theories of Dennis, Addison, and Dr. Johnson are easily applied to The Seasons.

The scientific "detail" which occasionally appears in Thomson's work (e.g. the rise of fountains and rivers in Autumn, ll. 736-835) is not irrelevant digression. It parallels, or serves to enforce, his physico-theological motif of natural and social harmony, as well as the idea of seeking to understand the Eternal through both the vast and the minute in nature. He employs geological, botanical, and meteorological imagery as part of his technique of dramatizing natural processes.

Thomson also endows various geographical sources

with the colouring of imagination. These sources are heightened through his attempts to create the sublime and the universal, and through a careful assimilation and humanization of materials.

According to most poets and critics of Thomson's age, poetry should teach and delight. Judging from his poetry, and his comments on poetry, it is obvious that Thomson is of the same mind. Unlike The Seasons, however, Liberty only occasionally truly delights the reader. Although the latter poem is somewhat lacking in dulce, in order to do it justice it is necessary to study it also from the standpoint of its "teaching" or utile function. Any work of literary art is a highly complex object with multiple meanings and relationships. Liberty is an almost entirely different kind of poem from The Seasons. This may be viewed as a difference in aesthetic intention. Much more than The Seasons, Liberty and Britannia are directly related to action and moral judgement. Through the assimilation of contemporary political events and philosophy, and the application of Shaftesburyian ethics to past and future history, Liberty emerges as a theory of social life and government, a complete imaginative whole. The primitivistic attitude sometimes evident in The Seasons appears in Liberty as the basis of his ideal theory of social and political liberty. Thomson sees Gothic primitivistic liberty as the

basis of the system established in Britain following the Glorious Revolution.

Despite the obvious differences between Liberty and The Seasons, there are also many obvious similarities. The world view which emerges from the later poem is consistent with that of The Seasons. The ideas underlying his theory of liberty and progress are part of his original scheme of cosmic unity and harmony.

The philosophical, religious, scientific, and socio-political "ideas" reflected in Thomson's poetry function as integral parts of the total patterns of these poems. They result in a poetry which is the emotional equivalent of the thought which it assimilates.

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PERIODICALS:

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS OF PERIODICALS:

ELH	ELH: A Journal of English Literary History
Exp	The Explicator
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
MP	Modern Philology
N&Q	Notes and Queries
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ	Philological Quarterly
SN	Studia Neophilologica
SP	Studies in Philology

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