

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The Seasons by James Thomson is dominated by a conception of order in nature. The poem treats nature not simply as an aggregate of individual details but rather as a vast pattern that has intellectual significance.

The pattern is conceived to be both static and cyclical in character. As a static pattern nature is presented as a set of aesthetic and moral relationships. In the poem individual scenes are treated as aesthetic compositions, in the manner of the landscape art of the period. The problem of moral evil is posed by the suffering nature can inflict on man.

As a cyclical pattern, nature is a pattern of action, a process. The activity of the individual objects of nature in their interrelationships with each other form the cyclical order of the seasons.

The poem's conception of natural order is reflected in its style. Rhetorical figures, such as periphrasis and personification, that have the function of referring an object to its place in a scheme of classification are extensively used throughout the poem. Moreover, its conception of order as a cycle of action is reflected in the use of participial endings, which express the continuous action of natural objects.

Convoluting in structure, the syntax of the poem employs what one critic has called a phrasal type of construction. Subordinate phrases and clauses as well as a Latin word order interrupt and modify the expression of thought. The effect of the convolutions in the poem's sentence structure is to suggest the multitudinousness of nature. But the syntax also reveals the order that underlies nature. By creating meaningful patterns of expression, such as comparison and contrast, its syntax suggests the patterns that compose the individual scene and that form the seasonal cycle of nature.

Thus, the poem does not simply describe nature. Rather, it presents a conception of nature, a nature that has form. Because it has form, nature is conceptually signifi-

cant, meaningful in terms of human understanding. The art of description, as it is exemplified in the diction and syntax of the poem, is an art of revealing the pattern that underlies the appearance of nature.

THE DESCRIPTIVE ART: A STUDY OF
JAMES THOMSON'S THE SEASONS

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Preface

The Seasons, James Thomson's major work, was in its time a popular poem. According to a famous story, Coleridge, on a jaunt through one of the wild, nearly uninhabited parts of England, by good luck chanced to find an inn where he could lodge for the night just as evening began to fall. The other patrons of the inn, as one might expect, were uneducated rustics, but he noticed, lying on a corner of the innkeeper's desk, a battered volume, a work that evidently was often perused. It was an illustrated copy of Thomson's Seasons. Coleridge told the story later as a tribute to the poem, a work of art which, despite its difficulties, was capable of attracting an uneducated audience.

The poem may never again be popular in that sense. Recent scholarship, however, has paid tribute to it in another way. The possibility now exists to read the poem with greater understanding and sympathy than ever before. The poem's achievement as a work of art is now more fully comprehended than at any other time in its history. It is hoped that the present study continues the tradition of paying tribute to the poem, the tribute of understanding.

The writer is profoundly grateful to Dr. William Cogswell and Dr. Charles E. Walton for their assistance in completing this study. To Dr. Cogswell's constant encouragement and advice, in particular, I am greatly indebted. It is a debt that cannot be adequately repaid. I also wish to acknowledge here my gratitude to my parents, Lloyd and Twilla Chisham, for their patience and understanding. Without their support through the long process of scholarship, this study would not have been possible.

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Chapter I

The Book of Nature: The Philosophical Background of Description

Characteristic of the description of nature in James Thomson's The Seasons is an attitude of intellectual appreciation.¹ Unlike the poetry of the Romantic nature movement, the poem's interest in nature is predominantly rational rather than emotional. It is concerned primarily with the rational meaning of nature rather than the emotions that nature evokes in the poet.² Although its subject is nature, its attitude is Neoclassic rather than Romantic.³ In its rationalism, it exemplifies the dominant attitude of its age, for the Neoclassic attitude toward nature characteristically was rational.⁴

Interest in nature during the eighteenth century was solidly based upon the great contemporary philosophies of

¹Herbert Drennon, "Scientific Rationalism and James Thomson's Poetic Art," SP, XXXI (1934), 468.

²Ibid., p. 471.

³Myra Reynolds, The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry, p. 96.

George G. Williams, "The Beginnings of Nature Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," SP, XXVII (1930), 599.

nature. On one hand, Newtonian science demonstrated the existence of physical law in nature and thus confirmed the belief in a rational order of nature. On the other hand, the fundamental harmony of the order of nature was used by Shaftesburian philosophers as a proof of its ultimate moral goodness. Moreover, both philosophies were related to metaphysical conceptions of nature as a manifestation of God.⁵ Contemporary poetry in which nature was the subject typically incorporated aspects of Newtonian science, Shaftesburian philosophy, and Deism, and, as a result, the view of nature in such poetry was predominantly rational.⁶ The rational attitude exhibited in The Seasons is, therefore, an attitude that was common at the time.

This fundamental attitude is expressed both in the poem's subject matter and style. It often incorporates contemporary scientific discoveries as part of its explicit content.⁷ Because the science of the time was related to a system of philosophical beliefs concerning the rational order of nature, the explicit scientific content in The

⁵Ibid., p. 602.

⁶Bonamy Dobree, "Nature Poetry in the Early Eighteenth Century," Essays and Studies, ed. Sybil Rosenfield, pp. 28-29.

⁷Herbert Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," Englische Studien, LXX (1936), 358.

Seasons reflects the poem's rational view of nature.⁸ Moreover, a rational attitude is conveyed through its language. The language of its descriptions is more general than concrete, more concerned with the meaning of a scene than its physical details. As a result, the poem's treatment of nature is more conceptual than literal.⁹

This rational attitude is reflected in its conception of nature. Underlying the explicit content of its descriptions is a conception of nature as an order. According to Patricia Spacks, what the descriptions are most notable for "is not freshness of descriptive detail or strongly individual imagery; it is the totality of a vision."¹⁰ The descriptions attempt to express not merely the physical characteristics of nature but rather the order of nature.¹¹ This conception of order is the dominant motif in the descriptions of The Seasons. Two types of order can be differentiated. One is that of a pattern, a pattern of relationships connecting the diverse elements of nature. The other is that of a process, a process of transformation in which the various elements of nature influence and act upon one

⁸Drennon, "Scientific Rationalism," p. 460.

⁹Patricia Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 19.

¹⁰Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, p. 198.

¹¹Patricia Spacks, The Varied God, p. 122.

another in relation to the cyclical order of the seasons. These two types of order constitute the conception of nature expressed in the poem. This conception of nature, in turn, is reflected in the style of its descriptions. The theme of order in nature is expressed through the method of description; the poem's diction and syntax reveal the patterns and actions in the scenes that are described. The conception of nature as an order, then, is one that dominates the poem.

It was not an unusual one at the time the poem was written. It was an important concept in contemporary philosophies of nature, and their influence is evident in the poem. One expression of the current belief in the order of nature was the concept of a chain of being. According to this idea, a hierarchy of life existed in the universe; every form of life occupied some position on a scale that extended from God to man and from man downwards.¹² A closely related idea was that of plentitude. Each level of being existed to fulfill the requirements of the great order, and each contributed its share to the completeness of the chain.¹³ The concept of a chain of being is specifically referred to in The Seasons:

¹²Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, p. 198.

¹³Ibid., p. 186.

Has any seen
 The mighty Chain of Beings, lessening down
 From Infinite Perfection to the brink
 Of dreary Nothing--desolate abyss
 From which astonished Thought, recoiling, turns?¹⁴

In other passages of the poem, however, the reference to this concept is indirect:

If the worlds
 On worlds enclosed should on man's senses burst,
 From cates ambrosial, and the nectar'd bowl,
 He would abhorrent turn; and in dead night,
 When silence sleeps o'er all, be stunned with noise.¹⁵

The allusion in this passage is to the concept of plentitude.¹⁶ Although not directly stated, it is implied in the thought expressed.

The concept of natural order was particularly significant in metaphysical speculation because the order of nature was thought to prove the existence of God. According to the Newtonian physico-theologians in particular, the scientific laws of nature logically implied a Creator.¹⁷ The relationship between God and His Creation was a logical one. For this reason, it was considered possible to achieve an intellectual apprehension of God by tracing the chain of causes and effects through the natural world to its logical

¹⁴James Thomson, The Poetical Works of James Thomson, Summer, ll. 333-37. Hereafter, only the season and line number of the poem will be cited.

¹⁵Summer, ll. 313-17.

¹⁶Lovejoy, p. 240.

¹⁷Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," p. 370.

Cause.¹⁸ The close relationship between the Creator and His Creation tended to support a Deistic conception of nature. God was seldom identified with nature, but neither was he quite separated from it.¹⁹ Newton's definition of the relationship between God and nature avoided a complete identification of the two. According to Newton, nature was to be conceived as the sensorium of God. In this way, it was possible to understand God as being present to His Creation without being part of it.²⁰ The conception of nature as a manifestation of God contributed to its importance in contemporary thought. A popular name for Deism was the "Religion of Nature."²¹ The effect of Deistic conceptions of nature was to enhance the importance of nature. The development of interest in nature, especially as it culminated in the Romantic Movement, had its origins in the Deistic idea of nature.²²

¹⁸Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," p. 370.

¹⁹Sir Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, II, 332.

²⁰Herbert Drennon, "Newtonianism: Its Method, Theology, and Metaphysics," Englische Studien, LXVIII (1934), 405.

²¹Cecil A. Moore, "The Return to Nature in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century," SP, XIV (1917), 266.

²²Ibid., p. 250.

The belief in a natural order had a further significance in contemporary thought. The order in the natural world was regarded by philosophers such as Shaftesbury to be analogous to the harmony that was desirable in man's moral world.²³ Since all of nature was a manifestation of God, the theorists of the time reasoned that all created things were analogous to each other as well as to God.²⁴ In the optimistic philosophy of the time, nature was regarded as logically perfect. Every part of nature, including its destructive aspects, was justifiably necessary to the great order that God had created.²⁵ The idea that the harmony God created in the physical order of nature was fundamentally similar to the harmony that was the basis of the moral order enabled the Shaftesburian philosophers to make the two analogous.²⁶ In the same way, man's aesthetic sense was considered analogous to his moral sense. A corollary of this belief was that his moral sense was innate. It was a natural capacity similar to his capacity for appreciating aesthetic harmony.²⁷ The existence of evil was recognized

²³Cecil A. Moore, "Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets in England, 1700-1760," PMLA, XXXI (1916), 270.

²⁴Earl R. Wasserman, "Nature Moralized: The Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century," ELH, XXI (1953), 42.

²⁵Moore, "The Return to Nature," p. 252.

²⁶Wasserman, "Nature Moralized," p. 45.

²⁷Moore, "Shaftesbury," p. 269.

by these philosophers, but it was a problem that they resolved by appealing to the fundamental harmony of the order created by God.²⁸ Thus, the order of nature was not only a proof of the existence of God but also the basis for a belief in a corresponding moral order.²⁹ Nature, then, if properly understood, was a source of metaphysical and moral instruction. For this reason, it sometimes was referred to not simply as nature but as the Book of Nature.³⁰

The influence of these philosophical concepts of nature is evident in The Seasons. In the first place, the idea of nature as a revelation of God has some thematic importance in the poem. The purpose of much of the scientific and nature poetry of the time was to glorify God through His Creation. In such poetry, nature typically was regarded as a manifestation of God.³¹ Thomson's work shows a similar tendency to perceive God in nature. According to C. A. Moore, the descriptions in the poem have a religious tone that is derived directly from its "conception of the outward and visible world as a revelation of the Deity."³²

²⁸Herbert Drennon, "James Thomson's Ethical Theory and Scientific Rationalism," PQ, XIV (1935), 80.

²⁹Ibid., p. 73.

³⁰Moore, "The Return to Nature," p. 272.

³¹William Powell Jones, The Rhetoric of Science, p. 106.

³²Moore, "The Return to Nature," p. 272.

Herbert Drennon, however, has noted that the poem does not identify God with His Creation.³³ And, in this regard, Patricia Spack's formulation of the relationship between God and nature in the poem is noteworthy: "The force of Nature orders the universe; God is usually envisioned as equivalent to this natural force, or dominating it, but not as a personal entity."³⁴ Elsewhere, Spacks observes that the poem's descriptions are primarily concerned with the theme of order in nature.³⁵ God as the Creator of nature is, then, one of the themes in the poem, but it is not the principal theme.

The theme of order in nature is the predominant theme of the poem, and it is one that was directly influenced by contemporary philosophy. This influence is apparent in its frequent use of scientific subject matter. References to Newtonian science often occur in the poem, particularly in its Summer section.³⁶ In the following passage, the subject matter is scientific:³⁷

³³Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," p. 366.

³⁴Spacks, The Varied God, p. 14.

³⁵Ibid., p. 122.

³⁶Marjorie H. Nicolson, Newton Demands the Muse, p. 51.

³⁷Herbert Drennon, "James Thomson's Contact with Newtonianism," PMLA, XLIX (1934), 78.

Some Sages say, that, where the numerous wave
 For ever lashes the resounding shore,
 Drill'd through the sandy stratum, every way,
 The Waters with the sandy stratum rise;
 Amid whose angles, infinitely strain'd,
 They joyful leave their jaggy salts behind,
 And clear and sweeten as they soak along.³⁸

The influence of science is reflected, moreover, in the poem's attitude toward nature. In its use of scientific material, it exhibits an intellectual attitude. It is concerned not simply with nature but with the scientific laws by which nature operates.³⁹ Scientific topics in the poem, then, are related to its theme of order in nature. Science is a method for understanding the order of nature. Man's capacity to comprehend the natural order through the use of science is the implied meaning of the following passage:⁴⁰

The great Deliverer he [Bacon]! who, from the gloom
 Of cloister'd 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.⁴¹

Thus, the scientific material in the poem is not important for the specific information that it contains. Rather, it

³⁸Autumn, ll. 743-49.

³⁹Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," p. 360.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 359.

⁴¹Summer, ll. 1543-50.

is important only in relation to the poem's theme of natural order. As a result, the poem is not concerned with the particular details of science, but rather with the idea of science. Its interest in science is based directly upon the theme of order in nature.⁴²

References in the poem to the philosophy of Shaftesbury are also related to the theme of natural order. In the thought of the time, the philosophy of Shaftesbury in no way contradicted the findings of Newtonian science. Its chief importance, rather, was in its use of the Newtonian idea of natural order as a basis for explaining man's moral world.⁴³ In The Seasons, also, harmony in the natural world is treated as analogous to harmony in the moral world.⁴⁴ Thus, aesthetic harmony is made directly analogous to moral harmony. An important assumption underlying the poem is that aesthetic beauty and moral goodness are fundamentally the same.⁴⁵ For this reason, nature has a moral connotation. The contemplation of the beauty of nature is treated in the poem as a source of moral improvement. The aesthetic quality of nature is regarded as capable of producing in the

⁴²Spacks, The Varied God, p. 130.

⁴³Jones, p. 27.

⁴⁴Drennon, "James Thomson's Ethical Theory," p. 72.

⁴⁵Moore, "The Return to Nature," p. 274.

observer benevolent, moral feelings.⁴⁶ This moral character of nature is referred to in the following passage:⁴⁷

I solitary court
The inspiring breeze, and meditate the book
Of Nature, ever open; aiming thence,
Warm from the heart, to learn the moral Song.⁴⁸

The moral influence of nature is shown in the poem to be an important contribution to the quality of man's life. Through the rational contemplation of nature, he is able to understand and improve his moral condition.⁴⁹ Thus, the poem's theme of order in nature has a moral significance.

In addition to enhancing the poem's theme, the influence of the Shaftesburian philosophy provided a rationale for its descriptions. The concept of the moral influence of nature implied that the description of nature could have a didactic moral purpose. According to Patricia Spacks, this rationale for description is present in the poem, and it can be attributed to the influence of Shaftesbury.⁵⁰ The moral aspect of the poem's descriptions is evident in its alternation between descriptive and didactic passages. In much

⁴⁶Drennon, "James Thomson's Ethical Theory," p. 78.

⁴⁷Amy Louise Reed, The Background of Gray's Elegy,

⁴⁸Autumn, ll. 669-72.

⁴⁹Drennon, "James Thomson's Ethical Theory," p. 77.

⁵⁰Spacks, The Varied God, p. 143.

of the descriptive poetry of the time, passages of description would be followed by didactic reflections in which the moral significance of the description would be stated.⁵¹

The relationship between descriptive and didactic passages was an analogous one. Each represented one half of an analogy between the natural and the moral orders.⁵² In The Seasons, also, descriptions are often followed by didactic reflections.⁵³ Together, the descriptive and didactic passages create an analogy between the natural and human worlds. Since both are necessary to the analogy, their mutual purpose justifies their existence.⁵⁴

Aspects of the Newtonian and Shaftesburian philosophies of the time are, then, evident in The Seasons. Their primary contribution is to be found in its theme of natural order. They contribute to that theme by providing an explanation for the order of nature and by demonstrating that harmony in the natural world is significant in moral terms. Both philosophies of nature were common at the time the poem was written. Thus, the theme of order in nature has an historical basis. It reflects a conception of nature that was firmly established during the period.

⁵¹Earl R. Wasserman, The Subtler Language, p. 183.

⁵²Wasserman, "Nature Moralized," p. 71.

⁵³Jean Hagstrum, The Sister Arts, p. 256.

⁵⁴Wasserman, "Nature Moralized," p. 70.

Chapter II

The Order of Nature: Pattern and Process

Underlying the explicit content of the descriptions in The Seasons is a conception of nature as an order. They not only depict the physical details of the natural scene but they also reveal the order that underlies and unifies nature. Thus, their significance lies not only in their explicit content but also in their conception of order in nature.⁵⁵

Two different aspects of this order may be distinguished in the poem. One is that of a pattern of static relationships. The whole of nature is linked together, each part of nature mutually dependent upon the others for its existence. The natural scene that typifies this view of nature is one of harmony.⁵⁶ Characterizing nature at the time of the Golden Age, the poem refers to it as "harmonious": "Harmonious nature too look'd smiling on."⁵⁷ Later

⁵⁵Spacks, The Varied God, p. 122.

⁵⁶John Chalker, The English Georgic, p. 129.

⁵⁷Spring, l. 258.

in the same passage, the harmony in nature at that time is specifically defined:

The youthful Sun
Shot his best rays, and still the gracious Clouds
Dropp'd fatness down; as o'er the swelling mead
The Herds and Flocks, commixing, play'd secure.⁵⁸

The other kind of order is that of a process of transformation. The natural process is an order of action, an order through which transformation occurs in nature. This transformation includes not only the seasonal cycle of nature but also the limited actions of natural objects as they influence and act upon one another. The poem expresses a view of constant change occurring in nature. The recurrence of specific events as part of the seasonal cycle, and the influence of natural objects upon each other in producing change, for interrelationships occurring in time among natural phenomena. Although these interrelationships constitute an order, it is an order that reflects the mutability of nature.⁵⁹

The concept of natural order as a pattern of static relationships can be further differentiated. According to Patricia Spacks, the descriptive passages of the poem present two different kinds of relationship, aesthetic and

⁵⁸Spring, ll. 260-63.

⁵⁹Ralph Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," in Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800, ed. Howard Peter Anderson and John Shea, p. 191.

moral. Some of the passages do not include man as part of the natural scene that they depict. In these passages, the order of nature is treated as an aesthetic entity. Other passages show man as part of the order of nature. A moral connotation is implied in these passages. Here, man's relationship to nature is treated as a moral one, moral in the sense that man is shown to be obligated to act in accordance with the order established by God. He is morally obligated to understand his place in the order of God's Creation and to live in harmony with that order.⁶⁰

The aesthetic significance of nature was directly commented upon by Thomson himself in his preface to the first edition of Winter:

In every dress nature is greatly charming--whether she puts on the crimson robes of the morning, the strong effulgence of noon, the sober suit of the evening, or the deep sables of blackness and tempest! How gay looks the Spring! how glorious the Summer! how pleasing the Autumn! and how venerable the Winter!--But there is no thinking of these things without breaking out into poetry; which is, by-the-by, a plain and undeniable argument of their superior excellence.⁶¹

Thus, Thomson regards nature as an aesthetic entity capable of producing emotional effects in the spectator. Many of the descriptions in The Seasons are overtly concerned with this kind of aesthetic quality. Samuel Holt Monk has

⁶⁰Spacks, The Varied God, p. 16.

⁶¹Thomson, The Poetical Works, II, 181.

categorized several passages in the poem as appeals to the aesthetic sense of the sublime. They can be classified as sublime passages because they appeal to the emotion of terror.⁶² Thomson's many revisions of the poem indicate, moreover, that he consciously endeavoured to appeal to the aesthetic emotions of his readers. Early editions incorporated material garnered from the popular travel books of the period. This material was highly sensational, appealing to the readers' sense of the sublime.⁶³ The poem's revisions indicate a conscious attempt to create sublime effects. Although specific passages apparently were amended for a variety of reasons, the overall tendency of the revisions is increasingly to emphasize the sublime aspects of the natural scene.⁶⁴ Thus, the poem was consciously revised for aesthetic effect.

One example of its aesthetic treatment of nature is its depiction of complete natural scenes in a manner analogous to that of the landscape painting of the period. Thomson's interest in nature from the standpoint of landscape

⁶²Samuel Holt Monk, The Sublime, p. 89.

⁶³Horace E. Hamilton, "James Thomson's Seasons: Shifts in the Treatment of Popular Subject Matter," ELH, XV (1948), 112-13.

⁶⁴J. W. Corder, "A New Nature in Revisions of The Seasons," Notes and Queries, XIII (1966), 461.

art is clearly revealed in a letter to his friend, George Dodington:

Your observation I find every day juster and juster, that one may profit more abroad by seeing than by hearing; and yet, there are scarce any travellers to be met with, who have given a landscape of the countries through which they have travelled; that have seen (as you express it) with the Muse's eye; though that is the first thing that strikes me, and what all readers and travellers in the first place demand. It seems to me, that such a poetical landscape of countries, mixed with moral observations on their governments and people, would not be an ill-judged undertaking. But then, the description of the different face of Nature, in different countries, must be particularly marked and characteristic, the Portrait-painting of Nature.⁶⁵

Although the projected work referred to in this passage is not The Seasons, many of the poem's descriptions do create verbal landscapes. In his use of the painting analogy to create natural scenes, Thomson appears to have been influenced by his friend, John Dyer, who was a painter as well as a poet.⁶⁶

The lengthy descriptions in the poem, particularly in its Summer section, are clearly intended to compose whole scenes in a manner resembling that of the contemporary

⁶⁵James Thomson, Letters and Documents, ed. Alan Dugald McKillop, p. 78, Thomson to George Dodington, December 27, 1730.

⁶⁶Ralph Williams, "Thomson and Dyer: Poet and Painter," in The Age of Johnson, ed. Frederick W. Hilles, p. 211.

landscape painters.⁶⁷ The relationship between these scenes and landscape painting is partially one of similarity in pictorial effect. Elizabeth Manwaring has characterized the Hagley Park passage in Spring as showing the influence of Claude Lorraine in its use of distance as part of the scene.⁶⁸ Moreover, this segment of the poem shows a concern for the pattern of relationships that constitutes the scene:

You gain the height, from whose fair brow
 The bursting prospect spreads immense around;
 And snatch'd o'er hill and dale, and wood and lawn,
 And verdant field, and darkening heath between,
 And villages embosom'd soft in trees,
 And spiry towns by surging columns mark'd
 Of household smoke, your eye excursive roams;
 Wide-stretching from the Hall in whose kind haunt
 The Hospitable Genius lingers still,
 To where the broken landscape, by degrees
 Ascending, roughens into rigid hills;
 O'er which the Cambrian mountains, like far clouds
 That skirt the blue horizon, dusky, rise.⁶⁹

C. V. Deane observes that the mansion referred to in this passage is used as a starting point for description, and that the items described are presented successively in relation to their distance from the mansion. Those that are near the mansion are first in the order of their presentation, and those that are near the horizon are, correspondingly, among the last to be described. Furthermore, the

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 209.

⁶⁸Elizabeth W. Manwaring, Italian Landscape in Eighteenth-Century England, p. 102.

⁶⁹Spring, ll. 948-60.

reference at the conclusion of the passage to Hagley Hall serves to contrast its proximity with the remoteness of the horizon and to emphasize the distance between the two.⁷⁰

Thus, the elements in this description are related to each other on the basis of their relative distance. They form a pattern determined by their distance from the mansion. The passage presents an aesthetic pattern of relationships.

Elsewhere in the poem, the conception of nature as a static pattern of relationships is expressed in terms of dependency. For example, this passage, near the beginning of Summer, is a eulogy on the sun as an important component in the order of the universe:

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: while, round thy beaming car,
 High-seen, the Seasons lead, in sprightly dance
 Harmonious knit, the rosy-finger'd Hours,
 The Zephyrs floating loose, the timely Rains,
 Of bloom ethereal the light-footed Dews,
 And, softened into joy, the surly Storms.
 These, in successive turn, with lavish hand,
 Shower every beauty, every fragrance shower,
 Hers, Flowers, and Fruits; till, kindling at thy touch,
 From land to land is flush'd the vernal Year.⁷¹

⁷⁰C. V. Deane, Aspects of 18th Century Nature Poetry, p. 105.

⁷¹Summer, ll. 112-29.

According to Patricia Spacks, the sun is treated here as a dominant force upon which the existence of the natural order largely depends. Without overtly stating the concept of the natural order, the passage reveals the significance of that order through its eulogy of the sun.⁷² The passage indicates that the physical beauty and animate force of nature are derived from the sun's power. Moreover, in describing man's appreciation of the bounty that the sun provides, the passage shows man as part of the order of nature.⁷³ The concept of natural order that is revealed in this passage is one of a static pattern of relationships.

This concept, also, is expressed in the poem's use of scientific material.⁷⁴ In the following passage, for example, the scientific content reveals a pattern of relationships that accounts for the activity of natural phenomena:

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.
 Strow'd bibulous above I see the Sands,
 The pebbly Gravel next, the Layers then
 Of mingled moulds, of more retentive earths,
 The gutter'd Rocks and mazy-running Clefts;
 That, while the stealing moisture they transmit,

⁷²Spacks, The Varied God, p. 75.

⁷³Ibid., p. 76.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 130.

Retard its motion, and forbid its waste.
 Beneath the incessant weeping of these drains,
 I see the rocky Siphons stretch'd immense,
 The mighty Reservoirs, of harden'd chalk,
 Or stiff compacted clay, capacious form'd:
 O'er flowing thence, the congregated stores,
 The crystal treasures of the liquid world,
 Through the stirr'd sands a bubbling passage burst;
 And welling out, around the middle steep,
 Or from the bottoms of the bosom'd hills,
 In pure effusion flow.⁷⁵

This passage is part of a longer segment that explains the natural cause of rivers. Their origin is treated as an aspect of the order of nature.⁷⁶ Two types of order are implied in the content of this passage. The successive layers referred to are elements in a geological structure, and are therefore related to each other as parts of a pattern. The geological formation that they belong to is an example of natural order. Moreover, the particular elements of that formation are related to each other by their common function of channeling water.⁷⁷ They are linked together by a static pattern of relationships.

The interest in pattern that is expressed in such passages implies a view of aesthetic form in nature. Jean Hagstrum comments that the nature presented in the poem is in a sense a kind of art. It is a nature that has been

⁷⁵Autumn, ll. 807-28.

⁷⁶Gertrude G. Cronk, "Lucretius and Thomson's Autumnal Fogs," American Journal of Philology, LI (1930), 235.

⁷⁷Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 34.

fashioned, and its total form, as a result, has been predetermined with nothing left to chance. Nature, viewed in this way, is art.⁷⁸ The order in nature is a pattern that has been created. Nature, therefore, can be apprehended as an aesthetic entity, its order corresponding to aesthetic form.

In many of the poem's descriptions, man is shown in direct relation to the pattern of nature. Some of them are concerned with subjects related to agriculture. They show man's livelihood as depending upon the forces of nature. In their subject matter, they clearly reveal the influence of Virgil's Georgics. The discussion of farming is an important element in Virgil's poem, and, although similar material in The Seasons is less important, the latter poem nevertheless shows the influence of the Georgic convention.⁷⁹ Many specific passages in all four sections of the poem are directly modeled upon The Georgics. Moreover, the poem explicitly refers to the example of Virgil as a precedent for the inclusion of material relating to agriculture.⁸⁰

In both poems, such material is justified by a perception of man's relationship to the natural order. According to The Georgics, an ideal harmony existed between

⁷⁸Hagstrum, p. 246.

⁷⁹Marie Loretto Lilly, The Georgic, p. 44.

⁸⁰Chalker, p. 96.

man and nature before his fall from the Golden Age. Since that time, he has had to labor for his existence. He has had to develop civilization to overcome the hardships that resulted from his fall.⁸¹ The Seasons also present a picture of idyllic harmony during the Golden Age.⁸² In both poems, man's labor is viewed as a means of ameliorating the conditions of his Iron Age existence.⁸³

The practical details of husbandry given in the following passage from The Seasons are an example of its theme of labor:⁸⁴

Insect-armies waft
Keen in the poison'd breeze; and wasteful eat,
Through buds and bark, into the blacken'd Core,
Their eager way. A feeble Race, yet oft
The sacred Sons of Vengeance; on whose course
Corrosive Famine waits, and kills the Year.
To check this Plague, the skilful Farmer chaff
And blazing straw before his orchard burns;
Till, all involved in smoke, the latent Foe
From every cranny suffocated falls.⁸⁵

Man's labor is seen, here, as necessary to prevent the occurrence of a blight. Thus, through his labor, man is directly related to the forces of nature.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 105.

⁸²Spacks, The Varied God, p. 93.

⁸³Chalker, p. 123.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 124.

⁸⁵Spring, ll. 120-30.

Passages not directly concerned with agricultural topics but based upon Georgic conventions also present man as part of the natural order. The following passage is an example:

Still let my Song a nobler note assume,
 And sing the infusive force of Spring on Man;
 When Heaven and Earth, as if contending, vie
 To raise his being, and serene his soul.
 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?⁸⁶

The passage is part of a longer section that describes the passion of love that the spring season engenders in animals, a theme based upon the Georgic tradition. Here, man is shown to be influenced by the same force that moves the animal kingdom. He, too, is subject to the force of love that dominates the season. In this respect, he is himself a part of the total unity that conjoins all of nature.⁸⁷ The basis for that unity is the relationship provided by the common feeling among all creatures during the season.

In some passages of the poem, harmony between man and nature is regarded as a source of virtue. The Laplanders in Winter are praised as a virtuous people:

⁸⁶Spring, ll. 865-72.

⁸⁷Chalker, p. 125.

They ask no more than simple Nature gives;
 They love their mountains, and enjoy their storms.
 No false Desires, no pride-created Wants,
 Disturb the peaceful current of their time;
 And, through the restless ever tortured maze
 Of pleasure, or ambition, bid it rage.⁸⁸

Passages such as this embody the theme of primitivism. The virtues of the Laplanders are related to their uncivilized and primitive existence.⁸⁹ The association of happiness and virtue with primitive living was a popular one during Thomson's age, and the association lies directly behind many passages in The Seasons.⁹⁰ The poem employs the theme in different contexts. The "hard" primitivism in the account of the Laplanders contrasts with this description of the luxuriance of tropical nature:

Wide o'er his isles, the branching Oronoque
 Rolls a brown deluge, and the Native drives
 To dwell aloft on life-sufficing trees--
 At once his dome, his robe, his food, and arms.⁹¹

The picture, here, is one of abundance and fruitfulness that recalls the Golden Age.⁹² It also associates virtue with primitivism: "The seat of blameless Pan, yet undisturb'd/

⁸⁸Winter, ll. 845-50.

⁸⁹Margaret M. Fitzgerald, First Follow Nature, p. 36.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 202.

⁹¹Summer, ll. 834-37.

⁹²Chalker, p. 107.

By Christian crimes and Europe's cruel Sons."⁹³

However, the theme of primitivism is not consistently used in the poem. It has been remarked that the passage just quoted, for example, is juxtaposed with another passage in which the opposite theme of material progress predominates. The poem oscillates between its enthusiasm for the theme of primitivism and its perception of the value of civilization.⁹⁴ For the most part, it regards civilization as necessary to man's happiness. In its view, primitive man lacks the three principal characteristics of civilization--reason, government, and commerce.⁹⁵

Man's relationship to nature is explicitly moral in those passages that develop the theme of retirement. The idea of retirement, of withdrawing from the active world to a contemplative life in a rural setting, was a conventional and popular theme in eighteenth-century literature.⁹⁶ In The Seasons, it is used in conjunction with the concept of a moral relationship between man and nature. One source of this relationship is the Shaftesburian analogy between moral

⁹³Summer, ll. 854-55.

⁹⁴Raymond D. Havens, "Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in Thomson," SP, XXIX (1932), 49.

⁹⁵Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage, p. 59.

⁹⁶Raymond D. Havens, "Solitude and the Neoclassicists," ELH, XXI (1954), 259.

harmony and harmony in the natural world. Because virtue is analogous to the beauty of nature, man's moral sense can be influenced by the natural scene. As a result of his contemplation of the harmony of nature, his violent passions are abated, and his benevolent feelings are stimulated.⁹⁷ Thus, retirement in nature is closely associated with virtue. The connection between the two is exemplified in this passage:

Thrice happy he, who, on the sunless side
 Of a romantic mountain, forest-crown'd,
 Beneath the whole collected shade reclines:
 Or in the gelid caverns, woodbine-wrought,
 And fresh bedew'd with ever-spouting streams,
 Sits coolly calm; while all the world without,
 Unsatisfied, and sick, tosses in noon.
 Emblem instructive of the virtuous Man,
 Who keeps his temper'd mind serene and pure,
 And every passion aptly harmonized,
 Amid a jarring world with vice inflamed.⁹⁸

The virtue of the "virtuous man" is a psychological state that he has achieved through the contemplation of his immediate surroundings.⁹⁹

Implied in this concept of a moral nature is the further idea of a divine nature. The moral feelings instilled in man by nature are ones that approach godliness.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, man and nature often are viewed in the poem as

⁹⁷Dwight L. Durling, Georgic Tradition in English Poetry, p. 55.

⁹⁸Summer, ll. 458-68.

⁹⁹Chalker, p. 116.

¹⁰⁰Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, I, 527.

members of a family, mutually related to each other and to God, who is the Creator of both.¹⁰¹ In this sense, nature is a revelation of God.¹⁰² Thus, the harmony of nature, both physical and moral, can be directly attributed to God, who is its Creator. According to Professor Alan McKillop, the divinity of nature is a source of the relationship between its spiritual and physical aspects. In creating them, God determined their order. The concept of the divinity of nature, then, is a concept of order, a concept in which two different kinds of order in nature, one physical and one moral, exist simultaneously in relation to each other.¹⁰³

Man's relationship to these orders is a contemplative one. Through contemplation, man is influenced by the divinity of the order of nature. The narrator of The Seasons retreats from the heat of the sun to the shade of a grove of trees:

Still let me pierce into the midnight depth
Of yonder grove, of wildest, largest growth;
That, forming high in air a woodland quire,
Nods o'er the mount beneath. At every step,
Solemn and slow, the shadows blacker fall,
And all is awful listening gloom around.

¹⁰¹Ralph Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 24.

¹⁰²Durling, p. 54.

¹⁰³Alan Dugald McKillop, The Background of Thomson's Seasons, p. 18.

These are the haunts of Meditation, these
 The scenes where ancient Bards the inspiring breath,
 Ecstatic, felt; and, from this world retired,
 Conversed with angels, and immortal forms,
 On gracious errands bent.¹⁰⁴

In this passage, nature is shown to exert a psychological influence on man.¹⁰⁵

The concept of a moral order of nature implies that the problem of evil exists in man's relationship to nature. Despite its order, nature is not a perfect harmony. A consequence of man's fall from the Golden Age was the destruction of the ideal harmony of nature. Total harmony, therefore, no longer exists. Instead, both harmony and disharmony occur in nature.¹⁰⁶ The existence of disharmony is a source of nature's destructiveness in its relationship to man. Its destructiveness poses the problem of evil. Because man's relationship to nature is a moral one, his suffering as a consequence of natural forces is a moral issue.

The problem of seeming amorality in nature is most apparent in those passages that describe storms.¹⁰⁷ In such

¹⁰⁴Summer, ll. 516-26.

¹⁰⁵Chalker, p. 116.

¹⁰⁶Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 30.

¹⁰⁷Spacks, The Varied God, p. 80.

passages, the problem of evil arises from the irrationality with which the natural forces inflict destruction on man. One example of the poem's treatment of evil is the tale of Celadon and Amelia in Summer. They are two innocent lovers who are unable to find adequate shelter when a sudden thunderstorm occurs. During the storm, Amelia is struck by lightning and killed. The poem makes no explicit judgment on the event, but the episode clearly indicates that the concept of a moral order in nature is a complex one.¹⁰⁸ In particular, the stress placed upon Amelia's virtue in the episode demonstrates that in the order of nature good can arbitrarily be punished. As a consequence, the moral order of nature can not be rationally understood by man. The death of Amelia can be reconciled to a pattern of moral order only in a sense that is beyond the power of man's reason to comprehend.¹⁰⁹

The problem of evil is examined again in the Winter section of the poem. Disharmony in nature is the predominant theme of Winter. The normal patterns of nature are altered, and its physical character is transformed by the season.¹¹⁰ Man's helplessness in confronting the forces of

¹⁰⁸Chalker, p. 131.

¹⁰⁹Spacks, The Varied God, p. 80.

¹¹⁰Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 253.

nature is emphasized in this section of the poem.¹¹¹ The evil that results from the elemental power of natural forces is the theme of the following passage:

As thus the snows arise, and, foul and fierce,
 All Winter drives along the darken'd air,
 In his own loose-revolving fields, the Swain
 Disaster'd stands; sees other hills ascend,
 Of unknown joyless brow; and other Scenes,
 Of horrid prospect, shag the trackless plain:
 Nor finds the river, nor the forest, hid
 Beneath the formless wild; but wanders on
 From hill to dale, still more and more astray;
 Impatient flouncing through the drifted heaps,
 Stung with the thoughts of Home; the thoughts of Home
 Rush on his nerves, and call their vigour forth
 In many a vain attempt. How sinks his soul!
 What black despair, what horror fills his heart!¹¹²

The suffering inflicted by nature, here, is the result of a deception. The old patterns in nature to which the swain was accustomed have been transformed, and, as a result, he has no reliable guide. His suffering is the consequence of the formlessness that has overtaken him.¹¹³ Thus, in this case, evil is a direct result of disharmony in the order of nature.

The passage emphasizes the pathos of the wanderer's death by describing the scene at home where his family awaits him:

¹¹¹Chalker, p. 131.

¹¹²Winter, ll. 276-89.

¹¹³Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 271.

In vain for him the officious Wife prepares
 The fire fair-blazing, and the vestment warm;
 In vain his little Children, peeping out
 Into the mingling storm, demand their sire,
 With tears of artless innocence. Alas!
 Nor wife, nor children more shall he behold,
 Nor friends, nor sacred home.¹¹⁴

The repetition of the phrase "in vain" is intended to evoke pathos. It is a traditional rhetorical device for heightening emotion.¹¹⁵ Thus, the episode demonstrates that man's suffering can be a direct consequence of disharmony in the natural order. The problem of evil is a fundamental one, arising directly from man's relationship to nature.

However, the poem does not attempt to resolve fully the problem of evil.¹¹⁶ Instead, it suggests that the appearance of evil is a consequence of the limitations of human reason. Local inequalities are subsumed in the harmony of the natural order as a whole.¹¹⁷ Since his fall from the ideal harmony of the Golden Age, man can believe in the wholeness of nature only through faith in God's benevolence.¹¹⁸ Thus, man's understanding of the total pattern of

¹¹⁴Winter, ll. 311-17.

¹¹⁵Lep Shapiro, "Lucretian 'Domestic Melancholy' and the Tradition of Vergilian Frustration," PMLA, LIII (1938), 1092.

¹¹⁶Spacks, The Varied God, p. 39.

¹¹⁷Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 28.

¹¹⁸Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 34.

the moral order is limited.

Thus, the poem presents a concept of natural order as a static pattern of aesthetic and moral relationships. In addition, the poem presents a concept of order as a process of transformation. This order is one through which changes occur in nature. One aspect of this order is the seasonal cycle, one that consists of a recurring pattern of changes.¹¹⁹ This kind of order is exemplified in the poem's format of the seasons. Each of the poem's four sections depicts one aspect of the seasonal cycle of nature and presents a dominant mood appropriate to its season.¹²⁰ Another aspect of this order is the interrelation that exists among the objects of nature as they act upon each other. Their actions form a continuous process of change in nature. In its description of specific events in nature, the poem exemplifies this aspect of natural order. The description of change as part of the cyclical order is a dominant characteristic of the poem's content.¹²¹ The seasonal cycle and particular events in nature are parts of the same process. Reference to the cyclical order of nature is implied in the

¹¹⁹Chalker, p. 128.

¹²⁰Ibid., pp. 130-31.

¹²¹Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 176.

description of specific actions.¹²² Thus, the concept of natural order as a process is expressed not only in the format of the poem but also in the content of its descriptions.

One characteristic of that concept is the limitation of single, isolated elements of the natural process. The cycle of nature is treated in the poem not as a complete harmony but rather as a series of separate units. Each season, according to this view, has its own individual character, different in kind from that of any of the others. The limitation of each of the seasons by itself is an expression of the transformational character of the process of nature, a process composed of composite, divergent elements.¹²³

The perception of limitedness in the natural process is expressed in the contrast between the four sections of the poem. In Spring and Autumn, nature is viewed predominantly as a creative, life-giving force. However, in Summer and Winter, nature is viewed quite often as an agent of destruction. In this way, the poem presents an alternating series of contrasting forces in the process of

¹²²Ibid., p. 191.

¹²³Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 93.

nature.¹²⁴ Thus, each season provides a limited perspective of the complete cyclical order.

Another characteristic of the poem's concept of cyclical order is the idea that the natural process is composed of distinctive elements that have a predominant, identifiable character. The cycle of nature consists of large divisions. Each season of the year represents a division in the natural process. Each division possesses a predominant identity based upon the kind of transformations that occur in nature at its particular time of year. In agreement with this view, each of the four sections of the poem expresses a predominant mood that characterizes its particular season. Critics have long recognized that a predominant mood can be identified in each section. In his discussion of the poem, Samuel Johnson described the moods as "the gaeity of Spring, the splendour of Summer, the tranquillity of Autumn, and the horror of Winter."¹²⁵ More recently, Ralph Cohen has demonstrated that the predominant mood of each section is one that is appropriate to the seasonal order of nature. His list of moods is somewhat different from Johnson's: "Spring is the season of love,

¹²⁴Chalker, p. 131.

¹²⁵Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, III, 299.

Summer of power, Autumn of fulfillment, Winter of deformity."¹²⁶

The mood of each section characterizes a particular type of transformation that occurs in nature as a result of the seasonal cycle. The mood of love in Spring, for example, is an expression of the renewal of life throughout nature that occurs with the end of the winter season.¹²⁷ The season shows the dominance of love by depicting it in the animal as well as the human world.¹²⁸ The mood of power in Summer is related to the heat and brightness of that sun that is particularly characteristic of the summer time. Both qualities are especially emphasized in this section by a description of the hot, equatorial regions of the world.¹²⁹ The mood of fulfillment in Autumn is an expression of the waning of summer. The season is a transition between summer and winter, and, for this reason, the poem emphasizes the changes and transformations that occur in nature during this time.¹³⁰ The mood of deformity in Winter describes the alteration in the physical aspect of nature that occurs in

¹²⁶Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 93.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 11.

¹²⁸Spacks, The Varied God, p. 121.

¹²⁹Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 105.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 174.

the winter season. The emphasis in this section of the poem is upon images of deformity and disorder.¹³¹

Thus, each of the four sections of the poem is dominated by a particular mood, one that is appropriate to its subject. This mood, moreover, describes the transformations that occur in nature during that particular season. The poem's format expresses a concept of cyclical order in nature.¹³²

A perception of complexity in the natural process is expressed by the diversity of subject matter within each of the poem's four sections. Individual descriptions in the poem often are juxtaposed with other descriptions that present a contrasting perspective of nature. Such passages, contrasting with each other in this manner, suggest the complexity of the process of nature. Two different perspectives of spring are given in the following passage:

Now from the Town
Buried in smoke, and sleep, and noisome damps,
Oft let me wander o'er the dewy fields,
Where Freshness breathes and dash the trembling drops
From the bent bush, as through the verdant maze
Of sweetbriar hedges I pursue my walk;
Or taste the smell of dairy; or ascend
Some eminence, Augusta, in thy plains,
And see the country, far diffused around,
One boundless blush, one white-empurpled shower
Of mingled blossoms; where the raptured Eye

¹³¹Ibid., p. 253.

¹³²Chalker, p. 130.

Hurries from joy to joy, and, hid beneath
The fair profusion, yellow Autumn spies.

If, brush'd from Russian Wilds, a cutting Gale
Rise not, and scatter from his humid wings
The clammy Mildew; or, dry-blowing, breathe
Untimely Frost; before whose baleful Flast
The full-blown Spring through all her foliage shrinks,
Joyless and dead, a wide-dejected waste.¹³³

In the first part of the passage, the creative power of the natural process is the motif. In the second part, the destructive possibilities inherent in the natural process is the theme. The juxtaposition in the poem of such contrasting motifs reveals the complexity of the forces of nature.¹³⁴

The poem's inclusion of diverse material reflects a view of complexity in nature. Because of this diversity, the poem lacks organic unity. Many critics have found fault with the poem for its lack of coherent form. According to one, the work has no continuity. Its individual passages are separate from each other, and it has no thematic development to provide a relationship between them.¹³⁵ According to another, its descriptions do not have an underlying coherent structure of thought. They are not directed by a coherent philosophy of nature that is uniformly and systematically applied in the individual passages. They are not unified by a common theme, and they do not embody a single

¹³³Spring, ll. 101-19.

¹³⁴Chalker, p. 133.

¹³⁵Stopford Brooke, Naturalism in English Poetry, p. 34.

view of nature.¹³⁶ Samuel Johnson, one of the earliest critics of the poem, observes that "the great defect of The Seasons is want of method." But he offers an explanation for this flaw: "For this I know not that there was any remedy. Of many appearances subsisting all at once, no rule can be given why one should be mentioned before another."¹³⁷ In Johnson's view, the faults of the poem are the necessary consequences of its subject matter.

The diversity of the poem's material can be partially explained by the poem's view of nature. The complexity of this view necessitates a treatment that incorporates many different kinds of subject matter.¹³⁸ Behind the poem's view of complexity in nature is the philosophical concept of plentitude, a concept that postulated the logical completeness of the physical abundance in nature.¹³⁹ The poem's attempt to represent adequately the physical abundance that exists in nature made the inclusion of diverse material necessary. In turn, the failure to achieve coherent form can be directly attributed to the diversity of the poem's

¹³⁶Reuben A. Brower, "Form and Defect of Form in Eighteenth Century Poetry: A Memorandum," CE, XXIX (1968), 539.

¹³⁷Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, 299-300.

¹³⁸Chalker, p. 90.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 128.

subject matter.¹⁴⁰

It has been argued that, in fact, the lack of coherence in its form does not detract from the poem. According to Ralph Cohen, the criterion of aesthetic unity is irrelevant to the poem. Its revisions indicate that Thomson was not concerned with the problem of unity and made no attempt to unify its diverse materials.¹⁴¹ An aesthetic structure, it is replaced by a principle of association. The poem consists of discrete blocks of material, slightly related to each other, grouped together by a pattern of association and connected to each other by the stylistic techniques of transition and repetition.¹⁴² In its collocation of different, disparate elements, the poem is a montage. It combines diverse elements, which, by contrasting with each other, contribute to a total representation of nature.¹⁴³ The diverse material in the poem reflects the diversity of nature. That diversity has a degree of order. The poem's format of the seasons places the diversity of its material in the context of the total cyclical order of nature.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the diversity of the poem's content is justifiable.

¹⁴⁰Wasserman, The Subtler Language, p. 179.

¹⁴¹Ralph Cohen, The Art of Discrimination, p. 130.

¹⁴²Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 105.

¹⁴³Chalker, p. 134.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 139.

Another element of the poem's conception of natural process is its presentation of interrelations among the different phenomena of nature as they influence and act upon one another. These interrelations extend through space and time. Space has three principal vertical divisions. It consists of ether, the region of the upper atmosphere that contains clouds; the middle air, a region between the earth and ether; and the earth.¹⁴⁵ Time also has three divisions, past, present, and future. In its treatment of the natural process, the poem describes nature in terms of all three spatial divisions and treats it from the standpoint of all three of the divisions of time.¹⁴⁶

For example, the following passage reveals interrelations occurring through space and time among the phenomena of nature:

At last,
 The Clouds consign their treasures to the fields,
 And, softly shaking on the dimpled pool
 Prelusive drops, let all their moisture flow,
 In large effusion, o'er the freshen'd world.
 The stealing Shower is scarce to patter heard,
 By such as wander through the forest-walks,
 Beneath the umbrageous multitude of leaves.
 But who can hold the shade, while Heaven descends
 In universal bounty, shedding herbs,
 And fruits, and flowers, on Nature's ample lap?

¹⁴⁵Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 176.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 190.

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176. ¹⁴⁵Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 190.

Swift Fancy fired anticipates their growth;
 And, while the milky nutriment distils,
 Beholds the kindling Country colour round.¹⁴⁷

The spring shower in this passage is a form of interrelation between the ether and the earth.¹⁴⁸ It acts upon nature to produce growth, and, in doing so, it is a part of the process of nature. The last lines of the passage describe the effect of growth as it is perceived by the imagination. From its standpoint, the shower is a source of life, and the life that it gives is described in relation to the future rather than simply the present. The effect of the shower exists as an interrelation between different times, the present and the future.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the interrelationships among the elements of nature constitute a process that develops in nature through space and time.

Action is a characteristic of the interrelationships in nature. The poem's descriptions show the phenomena of nature in action, and their action is a part of the natural process. Because of his portrayal of action in the forces of nature, Thomson has been termed a dramatist of nature. His descriptions depict movement rather than mere static scenery.¹⁵⁰ In this respect, his view of nature was similar

¹⁴⁷Spring, ll. 172-85.

¹⁴⁸Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," 190.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁵⁰Sir George Douglas, Scottish Poetry, p. 59.

to that shared by many of his contemporaries. In landscape painting, especially, a long tradition existed that emphasized the representation of action in scenes of nature.¹⁵¹ The importance of action in the poem's descriptions is related to its conception of nature as a process. Action, like the process in nature itself, occurs in time, and time is based upon the order in which transformation develops in nature.¹⁵²

For example, three different storms are described in

Winter:

Then comes the Father of the tempest forth,
 Wrapt in black glooms. First joyless Rains obscure
 Drive through the mingling skies with vapour foul;
 Dash on the mountain's brow, and shake the woods,
 The grumbling wave below. The unsightly plain
 Lies a brown deluge; as the low-bent clouds
 Pour flood on flood, yet unexhausted still
 Combine, and deepening into night, shut up
 The day's fair face.

* * *

Nor less at land the loosen'd Tempest reigns.
 The mountain thunders; and its sturdy sons
 Stoop to the bottom of the rocks they shade.
 Lone on the midnight steep, and all aghast,
 The dark wayfaring Stranger breathless toils,
 And, often falling, climbs against the blast.
 Low waves the rooted Forest, vex'd, and sheds
 What of its tarnish'd honours yet remain;
 Dash'd down, and scatter'd, by the tearing wind's
 Assiduous fury, its gigantic limbs.

¹⁵¹Hagstrum, p. 255.

¹⁵²Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 184.

Thus, struggling through the dissipated grove,
 The whirling Tempest raves along the plain;
 And on the cottage thatch'd, or lordly roof,
 Keen-fastening, shakes them to the solid base.

* * *

The keener Tempests come: and fuming dun
 From all the livid east, or piercing north,
 Thick Clouds ascend; in whose capacious womb
 A vapoury deluge lies, to snow congeal'd.
 Heavy they roll their fleecy world along;
 And the sky saddens with the gather'd storm.
 Through the hush'd air the whitening Shower descends,
 At first thin wavering; till at last the Flakes
 Fall broad, and wide, and fast, dimming the day
 With a continual flow. The cherish'd Fields
 Put on their winter-robe of purest white.
 'Tis brightness all; save where the new Snow melts
 Along the mazy current. Low the Woods
 Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid Sun
 Faint from the west emits its evening ray,
 Earth's universal face, deep-hid and chill,
 Is one wild dazzling waste, that buries wide
 The works of man.¹⁵³

Action is an important component in all three storms, and they can be distinguished from each other by their kind of activity. In the first description, the trees are buffeted by the storm; in the second description the branches of the trees are broken down; and in the third description a snow-storm covers the earth. Each storm is a process occurring in time, and each becomes more violent as it continues.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, together, the three descriptions reveal the transformation that develops in nature as the season progresses.

¹⁵³Winter, ll. 72-80, ll. 175-88, and ll. 223-40.

¹⁵⁴Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 185.

The differences in nature that are successively depicted in the three descriptions occur at different moments in time. The natural scene is different at different moments in time.¹⁵⁵ The process in nature that the storms reveal is directed by the cyclical order of the seasons. The appearance of the tree storms, one after another, in Winter indicates the character of the season. The storms are a consequence of the winter season. And thus the particular transformations in nature that result from the storms derive from the cyclical order of nature.¹⁵⁶

In the poem's conception of natural order, then, two principal kinds of order may be distinguished. One is a static order of relationship; the other is a dynamic order of transformation. One conceives nature as a pattern, a pattern that has aesthetic and moral significance. The other conceives nature as a process, a process through which nature is transformed.

¹⁵⁵Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 254.

¹⁵⁶Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time, p. 185.

Chapter III

Style of Description

The conception of natural order that forms the theme of The Seasons is reflected in its manner of describing nature. As a result of the poem's conceptual attitude toward nature, the focus of its descriptions is upon the conceptual character rather than the physical details of the natural scene. Their concern is with meaning rather than mere appearance. Implied in their treatment of nature is an intellectual as well as a physical kind of perception. Throughout the poem, references to physical sight are used metaphorically to suggest intellectual apprehension.¹⁵⁷ Many such references can be found. In Josephine Miles's tabulation of words used at least ten times in 1,000 lines, the word "see" occurs fifteen times.¹⁵⁸ The word "eye" is used 103 times in the poem. Its use in these cases often is explicitly metaphorical. The references are to the eye of reason or the eye of imagination. The word is used metaphorically for a kind of perception that is not visual in

¹⁵⁷Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 25.

¹⁵⁸Josephine Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language, p. 174.

character.¹⁵⁹ Emphasis in the poem upon intellectual perception is related to its recognition of the function of reason as an interpreter of nature. The physical actuality of nature is meaningful only when it is apprehended through the use of reason.¹⁶⁰ Thus, nature must be perceived with the intellect as well as the physical sight.

This recognition is reflected in the poem's style, a matter of both diction and syntax, both an integral component of the poem's style, and both conceptual in character. Specific elements in the poem's diction, such as periphrasis, personification, and the use of participial constructions, are conceptual in their reference to a pattern or a process in the natural scene. The syntax of the poem is conceptual in its stylized treatment of nature and in its use of syntactical relationships to emphasize the natural pattern or process that is presented in specific descriptions. The style of the poem, then, is conceptual. It is conceptual because it reveals the conceptual patterns that underlie the natural scene.¹⁶¹

The poem's diction is conceptual in that it defines the qualities of things and places them in a schematic order. It is conceptual because it is concerned with the meaning

¹⁵⁹Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 102.

¹⁶⁰Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 29.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 39.

rather than the mere appearance of the aspects of nature, and because it treats their meaning in relation to a conceptual pattern underlying the natural scene. In its concern for conceptual meaning, description in the poem is similar in function to definition. In his Dictionary, Samuel Johnson defines the word "description" as

1. The art of describing or making out any person or thing by perceptible properties.
2. The sentence or passage in which any thing is described.
3. A lax definition.
4. The qualities expressed in a description.

The third meaning is amplified by a quotation from Watt's

Logick:

This sort of definition, which is made up of a mere collection of the most remarkable parts or properties, is called an imperfect definition, or a description; whereas the definition is called perfect when it is composed of the essential difference, added to general nature or genus.¹⁶²

Johnson's definition suggests that an important function of description is to name the qualities or "properties" of things.

The naming of qualities inherent in the purpose of description implies the use of epithets. Epithets are an important element in the diction of The Seasons. Their importance in the poem is indicated by Thomson in a letter to his friend, David Mallet, in 1726, a date early in the

¹⁶²Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language, "description."

composition of the work:

Mr. Aikman did me the Honour of a Visit Yesternight, His reflections on my Writings are very good; but He does not, in Them, regard the Turn of my Genius enough. Should I alter my Way, I would write poorly. I must choose, what appears to me the most significant Epithet or I cannot, with any Heart, proceed.¹⁶³

Epithets, then, are an integral part of Thomson's poetry, and he was himself conscious of their importance.

The emphasis in The Seasons upon the use of epithets is apparent in the relative frequency with which nouns and adjectives appear. A statistical compilation by Josephine Miles demonstrates that in the Winter section of the poem nouns and adjectives are used more frequently than verbs. The average proportion of their use in ten lines is eighteen nouns, fifteen adjectives, and seven verbs.¹⁶⁴ The figures suggest that the poem as a whole is biased toward the use of epithets. Its language is predominantly concerned with naming things and their qualities.

Periphrasis is a type of epithet that is extensively used in the poem. As a rhetorical figure, periphrasis was an important element in the stock poetic diction that was used at the time, a diction that relied extensively upon stock phrases rather than single words.¹⁶⁵ Such phrases

¹⁶³Thomson, Letters and Documents, p. 45, Thomson to David Mallet, August 11, 1726.

¹⁶⁴Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language, p. 170.

¹⁶⁵Geoffrey Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 81.

were usually formed by two words in combination. Most often, the two-word compound was that of a noun and an adjective used together.¹⁶⁶ However, other types of compounds were used frequently. Professor Quayle distinguishes seven types of compounds. His classification of these types is based upon the grammatical relationship between the two parts of the compound:

First Type, noun plus noun; Second Type, noun plus adjective; Third Type, noun plus present participle; Fourth Type, noun plus past participle; Fifth Type, adjective, or adjective used adverbially, plus another part of speech, usually a participle; Sixth Type, true adverb plus a participle; Seventh Type, adjective plus noun plus -ed.¹⁶⁷

Compound epithets, especially those of the second type, can be a form of periphrasis. In this case, the noun part of the compound has a generic significance.¹⁶⁸ The adjectival part of the compound refers to a particular quality of a thing. In the compound epithet "the glossy Kind," for example, used as a periphrasis for birds, the word "glossy" denotes a quality of the birds' feathers.¹⁶⁹

The particular terms of a periphrasis, then, are significant in themselves and are not merely a circumlocution

¹⁶⁶John Arthos, The Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth-Century Poetry, p. 356.

¹⁶⁷Thomas Quayle, Poetic Diction, p. 102.

¹⁶⁸Arthos, p. 356.

¹⁶⁹Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 21.

for the thing that they refer to. Rather, they are a way of directing the reader's attention to a certain quality of a thing.¹⁷⁰ In its bias toward describing the qualities of things, periphrasis is a conceptual figure. It is not a statement of literal fact, but rather an expression of the conceptual significance of something. Its reference is not to the literal object itself, but to a mental attitude concerning it.¹⁷¹

Compound epithets are conceptual in that they define things in relation to a conceptual order. Periphrasis, in particular, is a figure of definition. The two parts of the figure form a phrase that defines the nature of the thing that is referred to.¹⁷² The periphrasis defines a thing by classifying it. Each part of the figure represents one category. The noun represents the general category to which a thing belongs, and the adjective represents the particular category that describes its precise nature.¹⁷³ Periphrasis, then, is marked by compression of meaning. The figure is a concise expression of many meanings that have been condensed into one statement.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰John Butt, The Augustan Age, p. 94.

¹⁷¹Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 51.

¹⁷²Arthos, p. 17.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁷⁴Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 21.

Moreover, its use reflects a conceptual view of order in nature. Periphrasis was a conventional figure not only in the stock poetic diction but also in the scientific writing of the time. Many individual expressions commonly used in verse belonged to the traditional nomenclature of science.¹⁷⁵ In this category, the stock poetic diction reflected the prevailing scientific and metaphysical conceptions of order in nature.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the individual epithet, as in the phrase "wandering moon," for example, refers to the established order of nature that the scientific thought of the time postulated. The adjective "wandering" is accurate because it agrees with the scientific fact that the moon is a satellite of earth.¹⁷⁷

The compound epithet also can refer to a metaphysical order of nature, such as that postulated by the concept of a chain of being. In this case, the generic term of the epithet, expressed in words such as "people," "inhabitants," "race," and "tribe," refers to a general group of creatures. The adjectival part of the epithet differentiates the specific class of the group by denoting its distinguishing characteristic. For example, the compound epithet "vegetable

¹⁷⁵Arthos, p. 32.

¹⁷⁶Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 42.

¹⁷⁷Arthos, p. 23.

race" differentiates the class of vegetables as one of the "races" that constitute the order of life in nature.¹⁷⁸ The use of periphrasis was common to the stock poetic diction and the scientific language of the time, and, in both cases, its use was related to a conception of order in nature.

The compound epithets that are used in The Seasons, then, reflect its theme of natural order. Periphrasis is used extensively throughout the poem and is an important element in its diction. In this respect, its diction is similar to the stock poetic diction of the time. However, Thomson used the figure with originality. Instead of repeating the standard phrases of the time, he invented new ones, thus creating a markedly individual diction.¹⁷⁹ But the principle involved in the use of periphrasis is the same in Thomson's poem as in the stock poetic diction of his time. For example, the two figures of periphrasis in the following passage refer to the order of nature:

The foodless wilds
 Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
 Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
 By death in various forms, dark snares, and dogs,
 And more unpitying men, the garden seeks,
 Urged on by fearless want. The bleating kind
 Eye the bleak heaven, and next the glistening earth
 With looks of dumb despair.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 43.

¹⁷⁹Quayle, p. 115.

¹⁸⁰Winter, ll. 256-63.

The distinction between rabbits and sheep is based upon their relationship to nature. The difference depends upon the different places that they occupy in the chain of being.¹⁸¹ The periphrasis defines their relationship to the order of nature. The figure "brown inhabitants" names a category of creatures whose color contrasts with the snow.¹⁸² The contrast indicates their inability to adapt to the winter season, a part of the natural order that has caused their suffering. Similarly, the figure "bleating kind" has a precise meaning in this passage. It refers to the helplessness of the sheep as they confront the conditions of winter. Their helplessness identifies a distinguishing attribute of their nature. Thus, the periphrasis denotes the category to which they belong.¹⁸³ In both cases, the periphrasis expresses the theme of order in nature. In its use of the figure of periphrasis, the poem's diction reflects its dominant theme.

Another conceptual figure is personification. The device was widespread in the poetry of the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁴ Its use was conceptual in nature. Abstract ideas

¹⁸¹Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 43.

¹⁸²Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 42.

¹⁸³Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 44.

¹⁸⁴Quayle, p. 192.

are defined in the philosophy of the eighteenth century as ideas that had been divested of their association with the individual and the incidental. They represented general categories, and they were often formed simply by placing a generic label upon a class of objects.¹⁸⁵ Personification is a representation of an abstract idea. It represents ideas rather than physical appearances, and it is concerned with abstract meaning rather than literal reality.¹⁸⁶ But it is not merely a departure from the particular and concrete to the general and abstract. Rather, it is the concrete image of an abstract concept. It embodies in a concrete form the abstract categories of the intellect.¹⁸⁷ Thus, it is a fusion of the particular with the general. It represents an idea that has been divested of its incidental associations to create a universal concept and then re-invested with specific attributes. The validity of the universal concept is retained, and, at the same time, the concept itself is made concrete.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵Earl R. Wasserman, "The Inherent Values of Eighteenth Century Personification," PMLA, LXV (1950), 449.

¹⁸⁶Bertrand H. Bronson, "Personification Reconsidered," ELH, XIV (1947), 168.

¹⁸⁷Wasserman, "The Inherent Values," p. 450.

¹⁸⁸Bronson, p. 174.

Personification, then, idealizes the physical world by revealing the universal concepts that the intellect perceives in that world. In this respect, it is a product of the imagination, and it represents an attempt to make nature conform ideally to the conceptual requirements of the intellect.¹⁸⁹ The figure is a means of embodying conceptual meaning.

Personification is used in The Seasons to represent the conceptual order of nature. The figure is an important element in the poem's language and is frequently used throughout the poem.¹⁹⁰ Many of the personifications in the poem are pictorial.¹⁹¹ Because they are a pictorial image of an abstract ideal, such personifications are ideal in character. When they are used in relation to the natural scene, they imply an idealized order in nature. The natural scene is idealized by personification to suggest an ideal natural order.¹⁹² For example, in the following passage, the description of nature is idealized by personification:

But yonder comes the powerful king of day
 Rejoicing in the east. The lessening cloud,
 The kindling azure, and the mountain's brow
 Illumed with fluid gold, his near approach
 Betoken glad. Lo! now, apparent all,

¹⁸⁹Wasserman, "The Inherent Values," p. 443.

¹⁹⁰Quayle, p. 143.

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁹²Hagstrum, p. 266.

Aslant the dew-bright earth and coloured air,
 He looks in boundless majesty abroad,
 And sheds the shining day, that burnished plays
 On rocks, and hills, and towers, and wandering streams
 High-gleaming from afar.¹⁹³

The personification suggests mythological significance in the sun and idealizes the scene that is presented. In its idealism, the description resembles allegory.¹⁹⁴ Personification, then, is used in the poem to refer to a conceptual order of nature. This function is a significant element in the poem. Hagstrum calls this use of personification the "central formal element in rendering landscape."¹⁹⁵

Natural personifications, in particular, are used to indicate a relationship between the human and the natural orders. For example, the personification of "Evening" in the following passage has both human and natural characteristics:

Confessed from yonder slow-extinguished clouds,
 All ether softening, sober Evening takes
 Her wonted station in the middle air,
 A thousand shadows at her back. First this
 She sends on earth; then that of deeper dye
 Steals soft behind; and then a deeper still,
 In circle following circle, fathers round
 To close the face of things.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Summer, ll. 81-90.

¹⁹⁴Hagstrum, p. 262.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁹⁶Summer, ll. 1647-54.

The physical attitude of the personification is one that suggests its human character. But the activity of the personification exemplifies the order of nature. The series of actions that the figure performs constitute a pattern. The pattern of transformations that "Evening" creates is a type of order in nature. Moreover, because the personification has human characteristics, it functions to indicate a relationship between man and nature as components of an inclusive order.¹⁹⁷

The poem's language expresses the concept of order in nature not only through the device of personification but also through a technique of investing the natural scene with human attributes. Patricia Spacks calls this technique one of personalization. It differs from personification in that personified concepts are not depicted as part of a scene in nature. Rather, the scene as a whole is invested with a suggestively human character through the use of epithets that ascribe human attributes to nature. Unlike periphrasis and personification, this technique is one of implication rather than definition. The natural world is not identified as a human order by any overt statement, but a relationship between the natural and human orders is suggestively implied through the use of appropriate epithets. Their use reflects

¹⁹⁷Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 177.

the perception of a relationship between nature and man, but it is not the consequence of a systematic philosophy concerning that relationship.¹⁹⁸

The influence of the stock poetic diction of the eighteenth century is evident in the poem's use of language to suggest human characteristics. Epithets in common use, such as "gilded," "painted," "embroidered," and "enamelled," imply a quality of decoration in nature. Thus, epithets appropriate to the social decorum of the period are used to describe the appearance of nature.¹⁹⁹ Some of the poem's epithets reflect this concern with decorous appearance. For example, the phrases "winter-robe" and "earth's universal face" attribute a human appearance to nature in the Continental manner.²⁰⁰

Other epithets imply a background of human emotion in the natural scene. For example, winter is described as "sullen and sad," grottoes are "weeping," the sky is said to "sadden." Nature in the Winter section of the poem is described in terms that suggest melancholy.²⁰¹ Josephine Miles notes that nearly two-thirds of the nouns in the Winter section of the poem are modified by adjectives that suggest

¹⁹⁸Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 38.

¹⁹⁹Quayle, p. 27.

²⁰⁰Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language, p. 219.

²⁰¹Reed, p. 162.

emotion. The epithets give a tone of emotional feeling to the description of nature.²⁰² This background of emotion suggests a human significance in the natural order.

The same technique is involved in the use of epithets that describe nature in terms of the human, social order. In a periphrasis such as "busy nations" for bees or "tulip-race" for flowers, the natural and human worlds are treated as components of a single, comprehensive order. The effect is to suggest a relationship between the natural order and the human, social order.²⁰³ Single words can have the same effect. For example, in the following passage, the word "father" ascribes a human significance to the storm: "Then comes the father of the tempest forth,/ Wrapt in black glooms."²⁰⁴ The connotation of human order implied by the word "father" excuses the violence of the storm by suggesting its relationship to a prevailing order.²⁰⁵ Throughout the poem, suggestions of this type of human order are evident. For example, nature is referred to as a "great parent." A total of eighty allusions to nature in terms that suggest a

²⁰²Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language, p. 219.

²⁰³Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 28.

²⁰⁴Winter, ll. 72-73.

²⁰⁵Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p.

human family can be found in the poem.²⁰⁶ The technique of personalizing nature is one that is frequently employed in the poem.

Other elements in the poem's diction reflect its concept of natural order as a process of continuous transformation. Because they occur in time, the transformations in nature are related to its cyclical order. At any particular moment, the character of an object in nature is the consequence of past alterations in its physical attributes and is subject to a natural process occurring in the present. Although the action of the natural process occurs in the present, it is related to the past as part of a cyclical order of transformation.²⁰⁷ The process in nature is a type of order occurring in time. The poem's diction reflects this concept of natural order through the use of participles to suggest the constant transformation of objects in nature. By indicating that the transformation occurs in time, the participles express a relationship between particular objects and the natural process.²⁰⁸

Both past and present participles are used in the poem. They function to relate the action of particular

²⁰⁶Cohen, The Unfolding of the Seasons, p. 23.

²⁰⁷Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 183.

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 192.

objects to past and present time. In the following passage, for example, the participles refer to action that has occurred in the past as well as to action in the present: "The uncurling Floods, diffused/ In glassy breadth, seem through delusive lapse/ Forgetful of their Course."²⁰⁹ The present participle refers to the action of the waves in the present, the action of becoming tranquil. The past participle refers to the same action, but implies that it has now become a part of the established, immutable past. The two participles relate the action of the waves to past and present time.²¹⁰

Participles also are used in the poem to show the relationship of past and present action to the continuous process of nature. They are used in the following passage, for example, to indicate the continuous character of the action:

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.²¹¹

Two different times are referred to in the passage, the moment when the ships are formed and the moment when they are

²⁰⁹Spring, ll. 159-61.

²¹⁰Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 188.

²¹¹Summer, ll. 941-45.

discovered. However, the formation of the ships is continuous; the process of formation exists not only before but also after the discovery of the ships.²¹² The participles indicate the continuous action of the ships. Throughout the poem, participles are used to show the continuousness of particular actions as part of the total process of nature. The frequency of their use demonstrates the importance of the poem's concept of nature as a process.²¹³ That concept is occasionally reflected in the use of specific techniques that are not used in the poem as a whole. For example, in the following passage, the use of words that suggest opposition serves to indicate the tension between winter and spring as the process of the seasonal cycle develops:

Forth fly the tepid airs; and unconfined,
 Unbinding earth, the moving softness strays.
 Joyous the impatient husbandman perceives
 Relenting Nature, and his lusty steers
 Drives from their stalls to where the well-used plough
 Lies in the furrow loosened from the frost.
 There, unrefusing, to the harnessed yoke
 They lend their shoulder, and begin their toil,
 Cheered by the simple song and soaring lark.²¹⁴

By suggesting their antonyms, words such as "unconfined," "relenting," "loosened," and "unrefusing," indicate the opposition between the imprisoning effect of winter and the

212Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 188.

213Ibid., p. 189.

214Spring, ll. 32-40.

energetic vitality of spring. Through their implication of opposing forces, the words emphasize the power of life, growth, and vitality characteristic of the spring season.²¹⁵ In particular, the use of negative prefixes implies that the process of nature is released by the spring season from a static confinement that the force of winter had created. Thus, the prefixes refer to the seasonal cycle of nature.²¹⁶

The syntax of the poem is another component of its style. It is a syntax marked by a tone of rhetorical ornateness and by the use of a convoluted sentence structure. In the density and irregularity that characterize its constructions, the poem's syntax is appropriate for suggesting the multitudinousness of nature. It is capable, moreover, of suggesting the order that underlies nature. The syntactical relationships of words reveal patterns of meaning in the natural scene, and they indicate the development of action as part of the natural process.

An ornate tone is created in the poem through the use of a latinized word order, a tone that Samuel Johnson characterized as one of "splendor."²¹⁷ In this, the poem

²¹⁵Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 18.

²¹⁶Cohen, The Unfolding of The Seasons, p. 3.

²¹⁷Johnson, Lives of The Poets, p. 300.

was influenced by Milton's Paradise Lost.²¹⁸ One type of latinism is the inversion of normal word order, as in this phrase from Summer: "To the quire celestial thee re-sound."²¹⁹ The phrase is a typical example of latinate inversion.²²⁰ Another type of latinism is a construction in which two adjectives are placed on either side of a noun. Phrases in The Seasons such as "joyless rains obscure" and "flowing rapture bright" are examples of this construction.²²¹ Certain kinds of words and word endings also reinforce the latinate character of the poem's syntax. Such words in the poem as "vernant," "amusive," "effulgent," and "emergent" are Latin in origin.²²² Word endings such as "-ive" and "-ous" are Latin in their type of formation.²²³ Although certain features of similarity exist between the two poems, The Seasons adopts the conventions of Paradise Lost to its own purposes. Their use is related to its own particular

²¹⁸Raymond D. Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 138.

²¹⁹Summer, l. 190.

²²⁰Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 133.

²²¹Quayle, p. 66.

²²²Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 135.

²²³Quayle, p. 66.

requirements.²²⁴

The latinized characteristics of the poem's syntax result in a stylized treatment of nature. The ornate tone of the poem, in particular, suggests a decorative and ornamental treatment of nature, a type of treatment that was common in the painting and architecture of the period.²²⁵ Because the mode of expression is not natural, the style of the poem has been criticized as a medium for the description of nature. Douglas Grant observes that the poem's latinized syntax impedes the direct expression of thought and conceals the meaning that it attempts to express.²²⁶ Another critic, Cornelius Haas, comments that its unnaturalness conflicts with the naturalness and simplicity of the scenes that are described. The poem's treatment of nature, in his view, is not in accord with the naturalness of its subject.²²⁷ However, the poem's latinized syntax has an aesthetic function.

According to Josephine Miles, the convolutions in the poem's sentence structure represent a sublime mode of

²²⁴James R. Sutherland, A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, p. 154.

²²⁵Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 138.

²²⁶Douglas Grant, James Thomson, p. 114.

²²⁷Cornelius Haas, Nature and the Country in English Poetry of the First Half of the Eighteenth Century, p. 107.

expression that was frequently used in the poetry of the time. The sublime mode was characterized by the use of subordinate phrases to create a convoluted syntactical structure.²²⁸ The following passage is an illustration of the sublime mode:

Strip from the branching Alps their piny load,
The huge 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!²²⁹

Subordinate phrases predominate, here. The passage is an example of the style of rhetorical magniloquence that frequently occurs in the poem.²³⁰ Characteristic of the style is its function of accumulating meaning. Nouns and adjectives predominate in the sublime mode, and, through the juxtaposition of subordinate phrases, they are piled upon each other in a cumulative manner.²³¹ In this kind of syntactical structure, meaning is developed through the accumulation of separate phrases. The movement of the syntax is constantly modified by individual phrases, and these

²²⁸Josephine Miles, Eras and Modes in English Poetry, p. 56.

²²⁹Autumn, ll. 781-86.

²³⁰Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 131.

²³¹Miles, Eras and Modes in English Poetry, p. 2.

phrases represent separate levels of development in the syntactical structure.²³²

The fundamental unit of the poem's syntax is the blank verse line. Because the line permits the extensive development of thought, it is appropriate to the poem's content. Diffuseness of expression is the norm in the blank verse of the poem.²³³ According to Samuel Johnson, blank verse is a suitable medium of expression for the poem's material, a type of material that requires extensive development.²³⁴ In using blank verse, Thomson followed a precedent established by Milton. Thomson was not an imitator of Milton. Rather, Milton was the model for a practice that was essentially original.²³⁵ But for both poets, blank verse is an appropriate means of expression for the sublime tone evoked in their work.²³⁶ The syntax of both poets is similar in its preference for long sentences and its tendency

²³²Bernard Fehr, "The Antagonism of Forms in the Eighteenth Century (II): Anglo-Classic Poetry and the Formal Garden," ES, XVIII (1936), 197.

²³³Henry A. Beers, English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century, p. 105.

²³⁴Johnson, Lives of the Poets, p. 299.

²³⁵George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day, II, 478.

²³⁶Butt, p. 93.

to relegate pauses to positions within the lines.²³⁷ In Thomson's poetry, separate lines are units in the larger structure of the verse paragraph. In their function as units of expression, the lines are seldom end-stopped, and caesuras are placed usually within the line. The effect is to break the smoothness of continuity of the syntax.²³⁸ The characteristics of the blank verse line are appropriate to the poem's description of nature. For example, in the following passage, the syntax is suited to the content:

At last the roused-up river pours along:
Resistless, roaring, dreadful, down it comes,
From the rude mountain and the mossy wild,
Tumbling through rocks abrupt, and sounding far;
Then o'er the sanded valley floating spreads,
Calm, sluggish, silent; till again, constrained
Between two meeting hills, it bursts a way
Where rocks and woods o'erhang the turbid stream;
There, gathering triple force, rapid and deep,
It boils, and wheels, and foams, and thunders through.²³⁹

The syntax of this passage reflects fully the multitudinousness of the natural scene that it describes.²⁴⁰

The syntax of the poem reflects a conception of order in nature by indicating relationships of meaning, relationships that form patterns. In the following passage several

²³⁷Geoffrey Tillotson, "The Methods of Description in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Poetry," in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature, p. 235.

²³⁸Saintsbury, p. 480.

²³⁹Winter, ll. 94-105.

²⁴⁰Tillotson, "The Methods of Description," p. 235.

patterns are implied in the relationships of meaning among the separate items of description:

Along these blushing borders bright with dew,
 And in yon mingled wilderness of flowers,
 Fair-handed Spring unbosoms every grace--
 Throws out the snow-drop and the crocus first,
 The daisy, primrose, violet darkly blue,
 And polyanthus of unnumbered dyes;
 The yellow wall-flower, stained with iron brown,
 And lavish stock, that scents the garden round:
 Anemones; auriculas, enriched
 With shining meal o'er all their velvet leaves;
 And full ranunculus of glowing red.
 Then comes the tulip-race, where beauty plays
 Her idle freaks: from family diffused
 To family, as flies the father-dust,
 The varied colours run; and, while they break
 On the charmed eye, the exulting florist marks
 With secret pride the wonders of his hand.
 No gradual bloom is wanting--from the bud
 First-born of Spring to Summer's musky tribes;
 Nor hyacinths, of purest virgin white,
 Low bent and blushing inward; nor jonquils,
 Of potent fragrance; nor narcissus fair,
 As o'er the fabled fountain hanging still;
 Nor broad carnations, nor gay-spotted pinks;
 Nor, showered from every bush, the damask-rose:
 Infinite numbers, delicacies, smells,
 With hues on hues expression cannot paint,
 The breath of Nature, and her endless bloom.²⁴¹

One pattern is the connection between the individual flowers and the force of nature. The flowers are produced by the spring season. The line "fair-handed Spring unbosoms every grace" identifies their source in nature, and the subsequent list of flowers is labelled as the creation of spring. The past participles "shed" and "enriched" indicate further their close connection to the natural order. Other possible

²⁴¹Spring, ll. 527-55.

sources of the flowers are identified, also. "Beauty," the "father-dust," the "florist" are alternative sources of their life. However, the passage clearly shows that the fundamental source of the flowers is the order of nature. It is a relationship that is signallized near the beginning of the passage by the reference to "fair-handed Spring."²⁴²

Other patterns are presented in the passage as well. The phrase "no gradual bloom is wanting" introduces a list of flowers; the syntactical pattern characterizes the flowers by their "gradual bloom."²⁴³ The list identifies the possible categories by which the flowers can be distinguished. The hyacinths represent the category of color, the jonquils fragrance, the narcissus mythological significance, the carnations and pinks form.²⁴⁴ Syntactically, a pattern of contrast underlies the passage. The reference to "gradual bloom" at the beginning of the passage introduces a list of particular flowers, while the conclusion of the passage questions that the "gradual bloom" can be fully described. The pattern exemplifies the pattern of the natural order.²⁴⁵

²⁴²Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 21.

²⁴³Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 181.

²⁴⁴Autumn, ll. 23-42.

²⁴⁵Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 181.

The process of the natural order also is reflected in the syntax of the poem. In the following passage from Autumn, specific words define actions that constitute the natural process:

When the bright Virgin gives the beauteous days,
 And Libra weighs in equal scales the year,
 From heaven's high cope the fierce effulgence shook
 Of parting Summer, a serener blue,
 With golden light enlivened, wide invests
 The happy world. Attempered suns arise
 Sweet-beamed, and shedding oft through lucid clouds
 A pleasing calm; while broad and brown, below,
 Extensive harvests hang the heavy head.
 Rich, silent, deep they stand; for not a gale
 Rolls its light billows o'er the bending plain;
 A calm of plenty! till the ruffled air
 Falls from its poise, and gives the breeze to blow.
 Rent is the fleecy mantle of the sky;
 The clouds fly different; and the sudden sun
 By fits effulgent gilds the illumined field,
 And black by fits the shadows sweep along--
 A gaily chequered, heart-expanding view,
 Far as the circling eye can shoot around,
 Unbounded tossing in a flood of corn.²⁴⁶

The subject of the passage is the transformation in nature that occurs with the change of season. "Attempered suns," characteristic of autumn, contrast with the "fierce effulgence" characteristic of summer. In addition the use of the past participle "sweet-beam'd" emphasizes the repeated gentleness of the autumn days.²⁴⁷ The interconnectedness of nature is suggested by the implied comparison between

²⁴⁶Autumn, ll. 23-42.

²⁴⁷Cohen, "Thomson's Poetry of Space and Time," p. 186.

the harvest and the sky. The calmness of the harvests is compared to the calmness of the sun. Moreover, the intermittent character of the season is indicated by the reference to "sudden suns." Similarly, the word "fits" denotes the intermittent recurrence of summer weather. In this context, the word "effulgent" echoes the quality of "fierce effulgence" characteristic of summer. "Gilds" and "illumined" are words that further emphasize a brilliance that recalls the quality of the summer sun.²⁴⁸ The words reveal the interconnection of the transformations occurring in nature as the seasons change.

In its two principal components, its diction and its syntax, the style of the poem reflects a conception of order in nature. It reflects not only the idea of a pattern in nature, but also the idea of a natural process. It is a style that is appropriate to the poem's conception of nature. Moreover, it is a style that in itself expresses the poem's conception of nature by revealing the patterns that underlie the natural scene and the specific actions that form the process of nature.

²⁴⁸Ibid., p. 188.

Chapter IV

The Perception of Significant Form

The art of description as it is applied in The Seasons is one that embodies conceptual meaning in the description of nature. Details are presented not merely for their own sake but also for their significance as part of the total form of nature. Their significance is derived from the poem's conception of nature as an order, which dominates the poem as a whole, underlying the poem's explicit content and implied in its style. Thus, the subject of the poem is not simply nature but a nature that is conceptually meaningful. In rendering the poem's conception of nature, the task of description is to ascribe intellectual significance to physical details. The stress upon the conceptual character of individual scenes, and the repeated use of physical sight as a metaphor for conceptual perception are indications of the poem's concern for intellectual significance. Most importantly, in reflecting the conception of natural order, the style of the poem suggests the conceptual meaning of the natural objects that are described.

The conception of order in nature was common in the philosophical thought of the period. It was also a scientific

concept. In science, its validity was amply demonstrated by new discoveries. It was also a religious belief. In Deism and other religious philosophies, the order of nature was regarded as a manifestation of God and a proof of His existence. Moral philosophers of the time, such as Shaftesbury, argued analogically for a moral order in the human world corresponding to the physical order of nature. The influence of these philosophies of nature is evident in the poem's content. Explicit discussion of contemporary scientific discoveries is a part of its subject matter. In didactic passages, the poem consistently treats nature as a revelation of God the Creator. References to the moral significance of nature often occur, and passages of description often alternate with didactic passages that elucidate the moral significance of a particular scene. The content of the poem reveals its awareness of philosophical significance in the order of nature.

Because it constitutes a form, the natural order is treated in the poem as having conceptual meaning. The form of nature is significant as an aesthetic entity. The various elements of an individual scene in nature compose a pattern of physical relationships. This pattern is treated in the poem as an aesthetic form, and the method of treatment used in the poem is similar to that used in the landscape art of the period. In treating nature as a revelation

of God, the poem also conceives a pattern of moral relationships to exist in nature, primarily between nature and man. The problem of moral evil is posed by the suffering and deprivation that nature inflicts upon man, a problem that the poem resolves by postulating a belief in the fundamental harmony of the natural order. Aesthetically or morally, conceptual meaning is inherent in the form of nature.

The conception of natural order as a process also has conceptual meaning in the poem. The four seasons that constitute the cyclical order of nature are treated in the poem as conceptual divisions. A conceptual mood predominates in each of the seasons that the poem presents, a mood that identifies the character of that particular season. In addition, the actions of natural phenomena in their interrelationships with each other are conceptually meaningful. These actions occur in conceptual divisions of space and time, and, as part of a process order of nature, their interrelationships comprise a conceptual order that connects them.

Conceptual meaning is embodied in the poem's style of description. In its use of periphrasis, personification, and participial constructions, the poem's diction functions to define conceptual qualities in nature. The figure of periphrasis classifies natural objects by their place in the order of nature, a place determined by their distinctive

quality. Personification represents mental conceptions in a concrete and pictorial form and suggests intellectual significance when used in the description of individual scenes. By implying action in natural objects, the poem's participial constructions reflect its conception of nature as a process. All three elements of style are conceptual in function.

The poem's syntax is a conceptual medium of expression. Its latinate structure and its use of phrasal constructions are aspects of its aesthetic treatment of nature, a type of treatment that has been called sublime. Moreover, the poem's syntax is used to suggest conceptual patterns or to reinforce conceptual significance in the description of individual scenes.

Thus, the poem uses description to suggest conceptual meaning in nature. The influence of Locke's theory that the images of nature are the source of ideas is evident in the poem.²⁴⁹ The theory enhances the importance of nature description. It equates conceptual understanding with physical perception, the intellectual with the visual.²⁵⁰ The effect of this theory is to justify the description of nature as an

²⁴⁹Kenneth MacLean, John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century, p. 60.

²⁵⁰Ernest L. Tuveson, The Imagination as a Means of Grace, p. 72.

intrinsically important kind of poetry.²⁵¹ It is important because the images of nature directly influence the mind. The connection between nature and the intellect is referred to in the following passage:

with Nature round,
Or in the starry regions or the abyss,
To reason's and to fancy's eye displayed--
The first up-tracing, from the dreary void,
The chain of causes and effects to Him,
The world-producing Essence, who alone
Possesses being; while the last receives
The whole magnificence of heaven and earth,
And every beauty, delicate or bold,
Obvious or more remote, with livelier sense,
Diffusive painted on the rapid mind.²⁵²

The idea in this passage that the observation of nature furnishes the imagination with images is an allusion to Locke's theory that mental concepts are derived ultimately from nature.²⁵³

However, the poem does not conceive nature to have conceptual meaning in itself or to be meaningful as an independent entity. Rather, a conscious perceiver, apprehending the form of nature, determines its conceptual meaning.

Spacks remarks that

In Thomson's imagery, meaning does not really inhere in the landscape; it is felt as the product of human imagination or intelligence contemplating the natural

²⁵¹Ibid., p. 75.

²⁵²Summer, ll. 1742-52.

²⁵³MacLean, p. 55.

scene.²⁵⁴

Meaning is a creation of the human mind.

²⁵⁴Spacks, The Poetry of Vision, p. 22

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