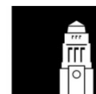

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The Golden Age and Iron Times: Pastoral and Georgic in "Spring"

Tess Somervell

For one hundred lines in the last version of "Spring" (234-335) Thomson turns his poetic "Eye" from contemplation of the eighteenth-century English countryside to contemplation of a distant past when Man "liv'd in Innocence" (237).[1] In the second part of the sequence, we see this age of innocence corrupted by sin and transformed into the "iron Times" (274), which are themselves followed by a destructive "Deluge" initiating the seasonal cycle (309). Finally, we return again, briefly, to a vision of that time when "Great Spring, before, / Green'd all the Year" (320).

The subject of the Golden Age—a (usually) past time of ideal ease and happiness—is common in early eighteenth-century poetry. References to the fall from that paradisiacal state are also frequent. It should not be assumed, however, that Thomson's use of the trope in "Spring" is habitual or perfunctory. Rather, as I argue here, Thomson invokes a varied tradition with remarkable precision in order to manipulate the generic character of "Spring"; notably to modulate the mode of the poem between pastoral and georgic. Here I follow Alastair Fowler in using 'mode' to denote a generic quality which may belong to a text of a different or no fixed genre, and 'modulation' to denote 'generic mixture' at a local level as well as the 'process' of generic mixture which may characterize a whole text.[2] The Golden Age and Iron Times narrative has a long and diverse pedigree in English and classical literature, one which extends beyond the category of any single genre. This range allows Thomson to allude in his version of the story to numerous sources of different genres, and particularly to Virgil's Eclogues and Georgics. In this way the story becomes a vehicle for Thomson to place different generic traditions in proximity to one another, and thus in tense but productive dialogue. By

tracing the passage's generic modulations, we can better appreciate its internal logic, and start to understand (though not necessarily resolve) its contradictions and apparent deficiencies.

The Golden Age and Iron Times episode of "Spring" stands out as an anomaly in The Seasons. For Ralph Cohen, in the description of the Golden Age "Thomson's poetic powers falter. The sense of growth, motion and time has, in the Golden Age, no proper alternative. The Golden Age appears as a series of assertions."[3] The problem is one of temporality (i.e., the conception of time and of how time works). In the Golden Age, time appears almost to recede entirely as "Dance and Sport, / Wisdom and friendly Talk, successive stole / Their Hours away" (249-51). Clearly, this contrasts with "The sense of growth, motion and time" elsewhere in The Seasons. It is not until we reach the post-diluvian "broken World" (318) that time becomes more familiar, and seasons bring changes in nature and in man's activities.

The movement from one state to the next is necessary so that The Seasons can continue, but that movement itself poses a problem. In depicting the transition from a Golden Age to "iron Times," and then another alteration in the form of the deluge, Thomson faces the same challenge that faced ancient and modern writers including Virgil, Ovid, Milton, and Thomas Burnet in their accounts of the change from a static paradisiacal state into a moving one: not only is there nothing in the first state to cause the change, but the concept of change in itself is antithetical to the world that has been established.

As Cohen suggests, the conception of time in the Golden Age part of the passage is conveyed by its structure "as a series of assertions": it offers statements that bear no clear logical or chronological relation to one another. This temporality is also expressed at the level of content, in the unchanging, unhurried lives which men lead in the Golden Age. Most important for this study, this temporality is also expressed at the level of genre. The

same is true for the methods by which time is explored in the Iron Times and post-diluvian age. Thomson employs generic markers—conventional images and tropes, and allusions to definitive works in various genres—in order to express the temporality respective to each age. This is possible because genres bring implied temporalities with which they have become associated, both naturally and by convention. Pastoral is used to express the temporality of the Golden Age: static, slothful, each moment undistinguished from the next. On the other hand, georgic brings with it the temporality necessary to "the broken World" of the seasons: active, constantly developing, each moment preparing the ground for the next change.

Though the passage as a whole appears to be structured around juxtaposition, offering stark distinctions between the static, pastoral Golden Age and the moving, georgic world of the seasons, between good and ill, and between 'then' and 'now', my aim in this chapter is to show that, in this part of "Spring," the genres are brought closer together than has been appreciated. Pastoral and georgic are even combined within single words and images. Through generic modulation at this minute scale Thomson mystifies not only the generic but also the temporal and even existential statuses of the Golden Age, the Iron Times, and the deluge. Each epoch is both pastoral and georgic, both past and present, and both real and fictional. Thus the transition from one age to the next is rendered ambiguous: the change can appear simultaneously causal and alinear, organic and catastrophic; we can even question whether any change has occurred at all. In this way, I suggest, the seemingly atypical Golden Age and Iron Times passage in "Spring" is emblematic of the larger movement between episodes in The Seasons.

"The fabling Poets took their golden Age": The Generic Background

To understand how Thomson modulates genre in the Golden Age and Iron Times sequence, and thus to understand how time functions in the passage, we must examine the generic traditions that are being invoked at each stage.

Despite its varied generic lineage, the Golden Age has become associated with one genre above all others, and that association was extant when Thomson wrote. In his Discourse on Pastoral Poetry (1717), Pope writes that "pastoral is an image of what they call the golden age," that is, "that age which first succeeded the creation of the world" when men's first employment was shepherding.[4] The most obvious generic references visible in Thomson's account of the Golden Age are to classical and neoclassical pastoral, and, above all, to Virgil's Eclogues. Yet, coming up with a working definition of pastoral, and moreover gauging what Thomson may have understood it to mean, is no easy task. Pope writes that "A Pastoral is the imitation of the action of a shepherd, or one considered under that character."[5] Paul Alpers takes this further, arguing that "the central fiction of pastoral … is not the Golden Age or idyllic landscapes, but herdsmen and their lives."[6] Can this be squared with David Scott Wilson-Okamura's point that "there is so little actual shepherding in Virgil's pastoral," and his argument that for Renaissance commentators Virgil's Eclogues were characterized by a range of other motifs including patronage, bookishness, love, and prophecy, and by various qualities of "style"?[7]

When discussing the use of pastoral in Thomson's poetry, I have proceeded by the cautious method: identifying what Fowler calls "generic allusion." "Apart from explicit labeling," writes Fowler, "the most direct form of indication [of a work's genre] is reference to previous writers or representatives of the genre."[8] I have traced Thomson's direct allusions to Virgil's Eclogues and Theocritus' Idylls ("the only undisputed authors of Pastoral," according to Pope),[9] or to other texts that also identify themselves with the Eclogues or Idylls through allusion to specific subject-matter. The subject-matter of pastoral goes beyond shepherds, however. The pastoral pedigree of the Golden Age

tradition in poetry derives mainly from Virgil's fourth Eclogue, in which the poet looks forward to a future age of peace and plenty. Elements from this vision were frequently, in later interpretations of the Golden Age, blended with images from the other eclogues, such as shepherds and love songs.

Once we turn to Thomson's Golden Age and examine its allusions to pastoral in detail, we will find that these allusions work to cultivate a particular temporality, one that characterizes classical as well as neoclassical poems in the genre. The distinctive temporality of pastoral is summed up by Cohen: "In the Golden Age, spring was eternal, and there was no need to stress the fleeting quality of the moment because time was irrelevant. In those days time went cheerfully along and harmony reigned."[10] Despite his assertion that time has "no alternative" in Thomson's Golden Age, here Cohen acknowledges that time is not exactly absent from the Golden Age but rather "irrelevant," which is to say, unmarked by labor or any other real action.[11] The Golden Age of the fourth Eclogue realizes this idea in its literal extreme by existing in a perpetual spring. The shepherds of the other eclogues technically do not inhabit this Golden Age, but they live in a similarly untimely state. "The herdsman of pastoral poetry," writes Alpers, "is conceived as the opposite of the hero: he is able to live with and sing out his dilemmas and pain, but he is unable to act so as to resolve or overcome them, or see them through to their end."[12] Pastoral resists engagement with the future. It is telling that the only sustained consideration of the future in the Eclogues is the vision of the Golden Age, which has been systematically reinterpreted as a vision of the past instead. The shepherds of the Eclogues turn away from political calamities which threaten their pastures to "forget [their] Care" in "Chesnuts and Curds and Cream," as well as love songs.[13] Pope censured Theocritus' inclusion of the georgic figures of reapers and fishermen in the Idylls, but they are properly pastoral in their experience of time. In the tenth Idyll the reaper fails to keep time due to lovesickness, and in the twenty-first Idyll, at the paused moment of midnight,

the fisherman Asphalion lies on the ground talking about his dreams of catching fish instead of actually working. This Idyll ends when his friend warns him: "Seek real Fish, nor starve with golden Dreams."[14]

The temporal "suspension" of pastoral poses ethical problems for poets.[15] When carried through, it results in the moral stagnation and "mental vegetation" of Marvell's arch-pastoral "The Garden,"[16] in which "the milder sun / Does through a fragrant zodiac run," but the "sweet and wholesome hours" are "reckoned but with herbs and flowers!"[17] When time is thus scarcely "reckoned," "the mind … Withdraws into its happiness … Annihilating all that's made / To a green thought in a green shade."[18]

The suspension of time and action in pastoral means that change is not easily accommodated. Alpers describes pastoral as "a poised, even secure contemplation of things disparate or ironically related," such as youth and age, life and death, or the choice between two lovers.[19] David Fairer theorizes similarly that pastoral is characterized by ironic dichotomy: "juxtaposition and contrast" between one state and its opposite, both in stasis.[20] Pastoral can analyze love and love lost, for example, but not love in the process of being lost. The transition from one state to another is inexplicable. In pastoral there is no time between different states in which gradual change can occur. Thus the temporal quality of pastoral has implications not only for the way in which Thomson can portray the Golden Age itself, but for the way in which the fall away from the Golden Age can be understood.

In expressing the Golden Age and its subsequent decline, Thomson invokes numerous other generic traditions alongside the pastoral. These include the Christian model of prelapsarian paradise and fall invoked in references to the Bible and to Paradise Lost, and the emerging physico-theological genre of nature poetry inflected with the science-writing of geological historians such as Burnet. The points at which these other

genres give shape to the "Spring" passage will be observed and analyzed, but together with pastoral I want to focus on the other dominant generic strain in the passage: georgic.

Georgic poses the same definitional problems as pastoral. Here, the key classical sources are Virgil and Hesiod. "A Georgic," writes Joseph Addison in his 1697 "Essay on the Georgics," "is some part of the Science of Husbandry put into a pleasing Dress, and set off with all the Beauties and Embellishments of Poetry."[21] Again, the definition seems to lie in a combination of content (farming, rather than shepherding) and style (the 'middle', more elegant style, rather than the 'low' simple style of pastoral). As his "initial working definition," Anthony Low proposes that "georgic is a mode that stresses the value of intensive and persistent labor against hardships and difficulties; that it differs from pastoral because it emphasizes work instead of ease."[22] On the other hand, Wilson-Okamura rejects the idea that georgic is defined simply by the presence of "labor and the plow," suggesting that, for early modern readers, "[i]nstead of labor, what defined the Georgics was variety."[23] Nevertheless, when Wilson-Okamura goes on to identify georgic poems, that identity seems to lie in their subject-matter of topics addressed in Virgil's Georgics such as farming, hunting, and bee-keeping. As with pastoral, my approach has been to observe the use of images and tropes drawn from Virgilian and/or Hesiodic georgic, including but not limited to ploughs and harvests.

The boundary between pastoral and georgic has been fluid since antiquity, as testified by Theocritus' dawdling reapers and fishermen. In the Renaissance, argues Fowler, georgic further infiltrated pastoral through the introduction of certain temporal tropes. Discussing Spenser's Shepheardes Calendar (1579), Fowler observes that pastoral's "world was timeless, a golden stasis rounded off by the completion of a single unvarying day. With this in mind we can see Spenser's Shepheardes Calendar as boldly innovative, modulating the pastoral eclogue as it does into a very distant georgic key."[24] Fowler also gives As You Like It as an example of this tendency for georgic time to disturb

the pastoral stasis: "other measures of time, notably the ages of the world and the seasons of the year, are frequently alluded to or sung about beyond any necessity of the plot. It is a play that makes pastoral and georgic confront one another."[25] The quintessential example of this 'confrontation' of pastoral and georgic time in Thomson's day was Pope's Pastorals (1709): four pastorals representing the four seasons, but containing shepherds whose love transcends (so they claim) the progression of time: "Sylvia's like autumn ripe, yet mild as May … blessed with her, 'tis spring throughout the year."[26]

Fowler identifies georgic by the presence of "measures of time." When we trace in the "Spring" passage the georgic imagery of harvests, ploughs, snakes, and storms, we see that these tropes are associated with those "measures of time," and that the georgic temporality distinguishes it from pastoral at least as much as does the husbandman in place of the shepherd. In contrast to pastoral, writes Fairer, "georgic is ever on the move, responding to local conditions, shifts in the weather, and difficulties and predations of various kinds; it is a world in process whose rewards are hard won."[27] In the English georgics of the Augustan tradition, which followed closely upon Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's Georgics and flourished until around the 1760s, this ongoing movement is expressed through the trope of the moving 'Now': Book II of John Philips's Cyder (1708), for example, moves from "Learn now," to "And now," to "Now also," to end on another "And now."[28] As Sandro Jung has observed, these "'now…now' constructions [can] denote simultaneity," but the construction as often introduces actions or scenes that could not be simultaneous, and so must denote a new moment experienced as 'now'.[29] The georgic husbandman remains grounded in the present, never knowing for certain the future fruits of his labors. Change is constantly on the horizon; yet it is change that depends, logically and causally, upon action in the past and present. It is for this very reason that the husbandman must constantly look forward and plan his next move: "Let him forecast his Work with timely care" (Georgics, I:352).

We might categorize the Golden Age as pastoral and the Iron Times and subsequent “broken World” as georgic, but this is too simplistic. Georgic and its associated temporality are present in Thomson’s vision of the Golden Age too, and pastoral in the “broken World” of the seasons; the Iron Times, similarly, contain traces of both genres and both temporalities.

Georgic and the Golden Age are far from incompatible. The earliest existing reference to the Golden Age appears in Hesiod’s proto-georgic Works and Days, and the opening of the Georgics describes how Jove brought an end to the life of ease so that Man would be obliged to work and invent. In particular, the rise of beatus ille or ‘Happy Man’ poems, drawing primarily upon Horace’s second epode and Book II of Virgil’s Georgics, disturbed both classical-pastoral and Christian conceptions of the Golden Age in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Horace’s epode and lines 458-512 of the second Georgic (639-737 in Dryden’s translation) describe the life of a happy husbandman, a labourer who works hard but takes pleasure in his simple, quiet life:

> Oh happy, if he knew his happy State!
> The Swain, who, free from Business and Debate;
> Receives his easy Food from Nature's Hand,
> And just Returns of cultivated Land!
> (Georgics, II:639-42)

Reflection on this “happy State” leads Virgil to observe, at the end of the second Georgic, its similarities to the past “Golden Age” (792). The Happy Man does not live during the Golden Age but in flawed and corrupt modernity. Nevertheless, ‘Happy Man’ poetry based on Horace and the fourth Georgic both reflected and effected changes in the conception of what constituted ‘the good life’. This in turn affected the way in which the

ideal life imagined to exist during the Golden Age was portrayed. The development of this sub-genre over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been chronicled by Maren-Sofie Røstvig, who explains that, "[w]hile the pastoral tradition is based upon a conscious idealization of rural life as a Golden Age, the classical tradition of the Happy Man involves a realistic appreciation of life according to Stoic principles."[30] Although, as Røstvig describes, the stoic tone of the classical sources was softened in the Restoration era and blended with social, Epicurean pastoral, it still matters that the Happy Man has georgic roots. His role as a husbandman "Inur'd to Hardship" (667) complicated the role of labor in a previously indolent tradition of writing about the ideal life. We might contrast the languid "Stumbling … fall[ing] on grass" of Marvell's "The Garden," with the epitome of the Augustan Happy Man genre, John Pomfret's The Choice (1700), in which the ideal life is one "in pleasing, useful Studies spent" upon "a clear, and competent Estate."[31] The Happy Man, though he has time for leisure as well as work, still participates in georgic time, tracing the logical connections between events, seeking to know the causes of earthquakes and why days are short in winter: "Happy the Man, who, studying Nature's Laws, / Thro' known Effects can trace the secret Cause" (II:698-99). Thomson translated this particular part of Virgil's Happy Man passage in his preface to Winter (1726), and adapted much of the passage in his eulogy on rural life at the end of "Autumn."

Analyzing the Golden Age and Iron Times passage in "Spring," it would be easy to miss the subtle distinction between Thomson's allusions to the Happy Man episode of the second Georgic and his allusions to the Eclogues. It might be tempting to conclude that Thomson himself made no such distinction between his pastoral and georgic sources. I contend, however, that Thomson was managing his allusions carefully in order to obfuscate the generic character and with it the temporality of his various ages. This was necessary in order to obscure the nature of the changes that occur within the narrative. Are

the turn to the Iron Times and the following deluge sudden, inexplicable catastrophes (the only kind of change that can be accommodated in pastoral), or are they the natural results of development over time (the changes that occur in georgic)?

"A Length of Golden Years": Thomson's Golden Age

The first 235 or so lines of "Spring" follow the narrative of an approaching rainfall, albeit with frequent interludes. We meet "yon dropping Cloud" in the opening lines (2), and finally "The Clouds consign their Treasures to the Fields" at line 173. After this the narrative continues: "Still Night succeeds" (217), "THEN spring the living Herbs" (222). Subtle though it is, almost lost amongst the invocations and digressions, there is a traceable linear progression both through a day early in the season and through the season itself.

Immediately after "The moistening Current, and prolifick Rain" finally come (233), and the plants rise, Thomson halts the onward movement through time and leaps back into history:

> The Food of Man,
> While yet he liv'd in Innocence, and told
> A Length of golden Years, unflesh'd in Blood,
> A Stranger to the savage Arts of Life,
> Death, Rapine, Carnage, Surfeit, and Disease,
> The Lord, and not the Tyrant of the World.
> THE first fresh Dawn then wak'd the gladden'd Race
> Of uncorrupted Man (236-43)

The "then" of line 242 appears at first to be sequential, an indicator that the poem is continuing along the same ongoing narrative, and that "the gladden'd Race" wakes after the spring rainfall and "Still Night" referred to in the previous lines. The suggestion is further pressed upon the reader by its following so closely upon the sequential use of "Then" in line 222. This is the temporal perspective of georgic in which different times are understood as parts of an ongoing, naturally unfolding sequence.

However, in "The first fresh Dawn then wak'd," "then" signifies not a time subsequent but a time past. In earlier versions of the poem, the line had read "THEN the glad morning wak'd the gladden'd race" (267 [1728-38]), giving further prominence to this pivotal temporal marker. Perhaps Thomson moved the crucial word to the middle of the line to temper the misdirection, just as he substituted "THE first fresh Dawn" (my emphasis) for "the glad morning." John Dixon Hunt argues that Thomson's "inert connective words" such as 'then' are "sleights of hand to evade explaining the relationships between" different modes, tones, and passages.[32] This "then" is far from inert; rather, it is a deliberate attempt to unsettle an easy reading of the "relationships between" the preceding and succeeding stanzas. This raises problems for Oscar Kenshur's assessment that "Thomson does not have a mythic, ahistorical sense of time. The creation was then, not now."[33] The creation may be located in the past, but the temporal status of other epochs, including the Golden Age, is under question at once.

In the next lines, this affective ambiguity of the temporal status of the Golden Age finds generic expression. The competition between pastoral and georgic is a competition for time: we turn to the lives of the men of the Golden Age, who divide their time between shepherding and husbandry:

> THE first fresh Dawn then wak'd the gladden'd Race

Of uncorrupted Man, nor blush'd to see

The Sluggard sleep beneath its sacred Beam.

For their light Slumbers gently fum'd away;

And up they rose as vigorous as the Sun,

Or to the Culture of the willing Glebe,

Or to the chearful Tendance of the Flock.

(242-48)

Adam waking from his "Aerie light" sleep in Book 5 of Paradise Lost (4) transforms into a georgic laborer cultivating the "willing Glebe" and then into a pastoral shepherd.[34] This mixture of generic markers points towards the temporal ambiguity in the following lines:

Meantime the Song went round; and Dance and Sport,

Wisdom and friendly Talk, successive stole

Their Hours away.

(249-51)

This social paradise resembles the "friendly Talk" of Virgil's shepherds (though not the isolation of Marvellian pastoral), as well as the companionship of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost: "With thee conversing I forget all time" (IV:639). And it echoes the collegial leisure of the Happy Man as he was interpreted in post-Restoration, Epicurean adaptations of Virgil's more stoic husbandman. So far, the generic sources seem to be merging harmoniously. But what time are we to understand by "Meantime"? Are these uncorrupted men singing, dancing, and talking, while they cultivate the glebe and tend the flocks, or later in the day, or are they taking turns? This may seem like a pedantic question. However, such a question is raised by the proximity of the previous lines on

(unstrenuous) labor, which offer a Protestant paradise in which "God hath set / Labour and rest, as day and night to men / Successive" as in Milton's Eden (IV:612-14). All this leisure "successive stole / Their Hours away," the gentle slyness of "stole" implying that time is taken from other, more legitimate, uses.

This phrase is key to appreciating the subtle inflections in temporality that Thomson is effecting through his generic modulation. By one reading, the present remains the same, each moment undistinguished from the others, with various activities happening at once in juxtaposition—farming, herding, dancing, singing, and talking somehow happening simultaneously. This is the time of pastoral, in which no change over time occurs. By the other reading, the present is changing, time moving onward, with different activities portioned out to their proper times in 'succession'. This is the time of georgic, which prepares the ground for something different to happen in the next moment. These "Hours," like the other "measures of time" that Thomson uses to describe the Golden Age, "Length of golden Years" and, later, "white unblemish'd Minutes" (272), are both counted and not counted, lost from record, even as they are recorded.

Over the next lines, the "sweet Pain" (253) of Virgilian pastoral love is juxtaposed with the "Reason and Benevolence" (257) of the Augustan Happy Man, who, according to Pomfret, is "In Reas'ning Cool, Strong, Temperate, and Just."[35] Next, Thomson turns to "Harmonious Nature," beginning with the weather:

> Harmonious Nature too look'd smiling on.
> Clear shone the Skies, cool'd with eternal Gales,
> And balmy Spirit all. The youthful Sun
> Shot his best Rays, and still the gracious Clouds
> Drop'd Fatness down; as, o'er the swelling Mead,
> The Herds and Flocks, commixing, play'd secure.

(258-63)

As with the men who manage to plow, herd, and relax simultaneously, the skies are clear as well as cloudy, and the days are windy, balmy, sunny, and rainy all at once. The words "eternal" and "still" make it difficult to disentangle the different weather conditions into different times; these words imply that all these weathers are happening simultaneously. This "still" also hints back towards the rainfall described earlier in "Spring": it is as though the same clouds as those that "Indulge[d] their genial Stores" (187) are still dropping "Fatness down" at this seemingly later time.

The herds and flocks lead us to the conclusion of this section of the Golden Age sequence, harking back to the theme of vegetarianism that opened the passage. The theme of animals also works to lead us into another theme, that of music, which in turn looks forward to the next change in focus.

> This when, emergent from the gloomy Wood,
> The glaring Lion saw, his horrid Heart
> Was meeken'd, and he join'd his sullen Joy.
> For Music held the whole in perfect Peace:
> Soft sigh'd the Flute; the tender Voice was heard,
> Warbling the vary'd Heart; the Woodlands round
> Apply'd their Quire; and Winds and Waters flow'd
> In Consonance. Such were those Prime of Days.
>
> (264-71)

At first, the movement from the "glaring Lion" to the sighing flute seems like a non sequitur, the connection scarcely sustained by the line claiming that "Music held the

whole in perfect Peace." The next lines soften the transition somewhat, as music and animals are brought together in the birdsong of the "Quire," and for a moment all is "In Consonance." The subject of music is introduced here in order to smooth the next transition, which is to the subject of poetry. Thomson is playing with the possibility that the juxtapositions of pastoral and the organic developments of georgic can be represented formally as well as thematically. On the one hand, we can read the Golden Age as "a series of assertions" that are not logically or chronologically related, as Cohen reads it.[36] On the other, it is possible to trace the growth, maturation, and evolution of ideas and images across the passage; to perceive how one idea is giving rise to the next as it passes away.

These lines (up to "Prime of Days") appear in every version of "Spring." However, "those Prime of Days" replaced "these Prime of Days" (my emphasis) after 1738, as Thomson tried to fix them more securely in the past. In earlier versions of "Spring" Thomson employs another method to distance the Golden Age from his readers in the present. He proceeds to another description of a Golden Age that may or may not be the same as "these Prime of Days."

"Allegoric Phraze": Another Golden Age

Lines 264-71 appear in every version of "Spring," but originally they were followed by a longer verse paragraph that Thomson omitted for his 1744 edition of The Seasons:

THIS to the Poets gave the golden Age
When, as they sung in Allegoric Phraze,
The Sailor-Pine had not the Nations yet
In Commerce mix'd; for every Country teem'd

With every Thing.

(296-300 [1728-38])

For John Chalker, "t]he vision of the Golden Age that we are given in the Seasons is essentially literary," yet here Thomson is explicitly distinguishing between the Golden Age of the poets and the real historical past that he has just described.[37] As he goes on, however, it is not clear whether these lines describe that time "When" these things really happened, and were then allegorized by the poets, or whether Thomson describes "those gaudy Fables" themselves.

At first glance, the Golden Age of the "Poets" is a pastoral, rather than a georgic, paradise. It borrows heavily from the fourth Eclogue as translated by Dryden. The conceit of the seas being unsailed due to the plenty available at home is the first clue to this source. Thomson's lines above map closely onto these from Dryden's Virgil:

But when to ripen'd Man-hood he shall grow,
The greedy Sailor shall the Seas forego;
No Keel shall cut the Waves for foreign Ware;
For every Soil shall every Product bear.

(IV:52-55)

As Thomson's account of the poets' Golden Age continues, the allusions to and direct quotations from Dryden's translation of the fourth Eclogue increase. In particular Thomson borrows from these lines on the generosity and fertility of nature in the Golden Age:

Unlabour'd Harvests shall the Fields adorn,

And cluster'd Grapes shall blush on every Thorn.

The knotted Oaks shall show'rs of Honey weep,

And through the matted Grass the liquid Gold shall creep.

(IV:33-36; my emphases)

Thomson takes from these lines the "knotted Oaks," the "matted Grass" through which the honey creeps, the grapes on friendly thorns, and the harvests that require no labor:

Spontaneous Harvests wav'd

Still in a Sea of yellow Plenty round.

The Forest was the Vineyard, where untaught

To climb, unprun'd, and wild, the juicy Grape

Burst into Floods of Wine. The knotted Oak

Shook from his Boughs the long transparent Streams

Of Honey, creeping thro' the matted Grass.

Th' uncultivated Thorn a ruddy Shower

Of Fruitage shed, on such as sat below,

In blooming Ease, and from brown Labour free,

Save what the copious Gathering, grateful, gave.

(300-310 [1728-38]; my emphases)

Many of these features of the Golden Age had appeared in Ovid's Metamorphoses, too. In this sense, this is very much the Golden Age of "the Poets." The crucial difference between Thomson's version of the Golden Age and that found in the fourth Eclogue is that Virgil describes a foreseen future, rather than the lost past followed by poetic fantasy described by Thomson. By echoing Virgil, Thomson is locating his Golden Age in the

literary past of "the Poets," but he is also raising the ghost of the possibility that the Golden Age is located in the future.

The image of the trees dropping fruit "on such as sat below" epitomizes the pastoral quality of Thomson's lines. Willingly yielding fruit was a trope of classical and neoclassical pastoral, from Theocritus to Marvell. The image represents a world of "blooming Ease … from brown Labour free." In the sensuous accumulation of alliterative sounds in Thomson's lines (shower… shed… such… sat… below… blooming… brown… gathering, grateful, gave), we feel his relish for lingering here, and for allowing the senses to overwhelm sense. But Thomson, notoriously lazy, was alert both to the attractiveness of leisure and to its dangerous temptations, its liability to stretch beyond a healthy period of time. "So egregiously lazy was Thomson," Robert Southey reported, "that he has been seen standing at a peach tree, with both hands in his pockets, eating the fruit as it grew."[38] Here in The Seasons, as in The Castle of Indolence, we see the time of leisure expanding to fill the hours, and the result, as Thomson well knows, is moral, intellectual, and artistic stagnation as well as sensual pleasure.

As Chalker notes, in both Virgil's and Thomson's accounts of the Golden Age and Iron Times, "there is no question … of either the Golden or the Iron Ages being given automatic precedence. Nostalgia for an idyllic past (or future) is entirely blended with pride in a vigorous present."[39] Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Thomson subtly undermines his own pastoral vision. In the lines "Spontaneous Harvests wav'd, / Still in a Sea of yellow plenty round," Thomson expands Virgil's pastoral paradox of "Unlabour'd Harvests." In just four words, he now employs two paradoxical pairings: the harvests are at once "waving" and "still," and are called "harvests" but are described as "spontaneous" (i.e., they are not attributed to a past sowing). Whether the "still" is taken spatially or temporally, the sense is troubling: if spatial, it contradicts the waving motion; if temporal (i.e., "continually"), it undermines both the spontaneity of the harvests and the fact of their

being “harvests” (meaning, the yields of something previous) at all, as it implies that these supposedly spontaneous harvests have always been there. The presence of harvests reminds us of the “vigorous present,” and the awkward, tangled paradoxes in these lines, combined with the heady abundance of the “Sea of yellow Plenty,” make the Golden Age start to look overwhelming, even stifling.

There are, in addition, more subtle allusions by means of which Thomson introduces georgic elements. “The knotted Oak / Shook from his Boughs the long transparent Streams / Of Honey” is clearly an allusion to the Eclogue’s “The knotted Oaks shall show’rs of Honey weep,” but perhaps also to the first Georgic, in which Jove “shook from Oaken Leaves the liquid Gold” (I:200). This line is from the description of the destruction of the Golden Age, when Jupiter rendered nature hostile. In Thomson’s image of Golden Age plenty is a glimpse of that plenty slipping away.

The close of Thomson’s verse paragraph on the poets’ Golden Age contains a similar ambiguity achieved through generic modulation:

> Nothing had Power to hurt; the savage Soul,
> Yet untransfus’d into the Tyger’s Heart,
> Burn’d not his Bowels, nor his gamesome Paw
> Drove on the fleecy Partners of his Play:
> While from the flowery Brake the Serpent roll’d
> His fairer Spires, and play’d his pointless Tongue.
>
> (318-323 [1728-38])

Thomson’s playful tiger and snake, which have no correspondents in the fourth Eclogue, appear to have come from the second Georgic. In his famous celebration of Italy, Virgil delights that “Our Land is from the Rage of Tygers freed, / Nor nourishes the Lyon’s

angry Seed … Nor in so vast a length our Serpents glide, / Or rais'd on such a spiry Volume ride" (II:207-12). Dryden's translation, though reasonably faithful, takes much from the "circling Spires" of Milton's serpent (IX:502).

In both these instances, Thomson takes images loaded with negativity—the removal of honey from the trees, and the frightfulness of the snake's "spiry Volume"—and transforms them into positive, Golden Age equivalents. Yet, the allusions to darker images, both of which represent the hostility of the fallen world, serve to foreshadow the end of the Golden Age. In this manner, they also remind us that Jove introduced labor, removed the honey, and "added Venom to the Viper's Brood" (Georgics, I:197) for a positive purpose: "That studious Need might useful Arts explore" (I:203).

These generic modulations are effected with impressive economy, within such seemingly innocuous details as Thomson's reference to sheep's colored wool:

> Nor had the spongy, full-expanded Fleece
> Yet drunk the Tyrian Die. The stately Ram
> Shone thro' the Mead, in native Purple clad,
> Or milder Saffron; and the dancing Lamb
> The vivid Crimson to the Sun disclos'd.
> (313-17 [1728-38])

Thomson's "Nor had the spongy, full-expanded Fleece / Yet drunk the Tyrian Dye" points clearly to the "native Purple" and "Tyrian robes" of Dryden's version of the fourth Eclogue:

> Nor Wooll shall in dissembled Colours shine.
> But the luxurious Father of the Fold,

With native Purple, or unborrow'd Gold,

Beneath his pompous Fleece shall proudly sweat:

And under Tyrian Robes the Lamb shall bleat.

(IV:51-55)

But Thomson's lines also point to the third Georgic, which states "'Tis true, the Fleece, when drunk with Tyrian Juice, / Is dearly sold" (III:479-80), and, moreover, to the beatus ille passage in the second Georgic, describing the Happy Man who "boasts no Wool, whose native white is dy'd / With Purple Poison of Assyrian Pride" (651-52). Thomson's embrace of naturally colored wool is a direct refutation of georgic's own rejection of dyed clothing. Thomson's Golden Age is thus aligned with the Golden Age of the Eclogues, where colored clothing can be enjoyed as natural, and not with the ascetic happy life of the Georgics in which only "useful Arts" are valued. Nevertheless, the Georgics are glimpsed in inverted form, as are their implied criticisms of Golden Age gaudiness.

By inverting so many georgic elements, Thomson invokes the genre that he is rejecting and gives it a presence in his poetry, disturbing the dominant pastoral mode of this section of "Spring." The result is that the fall, which occurs in the next lines, is less shocking. The serpent's supposedly "pointless Tongue" points towards the occurrence of this change. The aim of these deleted lines on the poets' Golden Age was to facilitate the change, for which a glimpse of georgic was necessary. The georgic allusions both represent and themselves effect a different kind of transition than that offered by the otherwise pastoral verse: gradual, organic development from one state to the next. But Thomson evidently felt that he was dwelling for too long upon the Golden Age, or perhaps sensed that his georgic allusions did not do sufficient work to moderate the temporal suspension of the pastoral vision which rendered organic change impossible. For the 1744 version Thomson placed the pivot back at where the "Winds and Waters flow'd / In

Consonance.” The flowing imagery is both at odds with the sudden change in the next lines, and in strange confluence with its watery imagery:

BUT now those white unblemish’d Minutes, whence
The fabling Poets took their golden Age,
Are found no more amid these iron Times,
These Dregs of Life!

(272-75)

‘Dregs of Life’: The Iron Times

For Hesiod, the Golden Age was followed by the ages of silver, bronze, heroism, and finally the Iron Age, in which he and his contemporaries lived. Thomson skips these intervening periods and moves straight from the Golden to the Iron Age:

Now the distemper’d Mind
Has lost that Concord of harmonious Powers,
Which forms the Soul of Happiness; and all
Is off the Poise within: the Passions all
Have burst their Bounds; and Reason half extinct,
Or impotent, or else approving, sees
The foul Disorder.

(272-81)

The lines describing Man's disordered passions echo both Hesiod's and Ovid's descriptions of the Iron Age. Thomson establishes a clear contrast to the previous Golden Age in which "Reason and Benevolence were Law." The overwhelming impression is of two opposite ages placed in juxtaposition, rather than successive parts of a connected process. As Cohen puts it,

> neither in the past nor in the present can the narrator explain the 'secrets' of the Golden Age or the reasons for the loss of 'Concord of harmonious Powers' (276). When, therefore, he moves from the Golden Age to its loss, he operates associatively; that is, movement from one condition to its opposite is not explained as necessarily derived from the original condition.[40]

Thomson faces the same difficulty faced by Milton in articulating the fall: there was no clear seed of imperfection planted in Thomson's "first fresh Dawn" which could explain how "the Passions all / Have burst their Bounds" (278-79). In 1744 the two main sections of the Golden Age/Iron Times narrative, the first beginning "The first fresh Dawn" and the second "But now[…]," are simply juxtaposed, separated by a paragraph break in which, somehow, this drastic alteration occurs. In 1730, the verse paragraph on the Poets' Golden Age had served to bridge the gap slightly by its easing of the supposedly real, historical "first fresh Dawn" into a fiction so that the negating force of the "But now" lands as much on the "gaudy Fables" as on "the white minutes which they shadow'd out" (325 [1730]). But in neither version, as Cohen argues, is there a logical or causal connection between the Iron Times and what precedes.

Cohen describes accurately the dominant effect of the transition, created by the use of pastoral imagery and temporality. However, studying the georgic imagery which Thomson interposed into his otherwise pastoral Golden Age, we can see that it did do

some work in the previous section to ease the transition. The georgic references suggest the potential amorality of the Golden Age, a laziness that might naturally lead to the "listless Unconcern" felt in the Iron Times (301). The nature of the transition, then, is ambivalent: was the fall from the Golden Age a dramatic, inexplicable change, as it first appears, or a natural and perhaps inevitable development of what came before? While the former is an unavoidable implication of the way the transition is portrayed, Thomson preserves the possibility of the latter through his use of the georgic mode within the pastoral.

The temporality of the Iron Times is difficult to define. It retains the pastoral quality of stagnation. It is grief rather than joy that "wastes the weeping Hours" (296), but a kind of ineffectiveness remains. This is expressed in the repeated use of "Or," offering different possibilities: "Love itself is Bitterness of Soul, / A pensive Anguish … Or, sunk to sordid Interest, feels no more" (288-90). By contrast, there is an attempt to develop a georgic temporality of incremental change, which is expressed in the language of organic growth: "Grief … into Madness swells" (294-95), "grows / The partial Thought" (300-1). The vocabulary of changeable weather is also a key technique by which Thomson shifts the tone from pastoral to georgic: "ever-changing Views of Good and Ill, / Form'd infinitely various, vex the Mind / With endless Storm" (298-300). These lines use georgic imagery to create a georgic quality of development in the structure of the verse paragraph itself, foreshadowing as they do the coming deluge.

In spite of the "Now" in line 272, Thomson goes on to transform "these iron Times" into another past, the sinfulness of which can serve as a supposedly logical explanation for the next catastrophe, the deluge. This follows the chronology of Ovid's Metamorphoses 1; however, whereas Ovid makes clear that the flood is sent as punishment from Jove for man's sins in the Iron Age, and has the effect of killing all mankind but two, Thomson is much less clear about both the cause and the effect of his

deluge, and whether or not they bring an end to the Iron Times. Thomson seems to have been undecided about the temporal status of the Iron Times, as he was about "those Prime of Days"; he turned "these iron Times, / These Dregs of Life" of the first edition of Spring into "those iron Times, / Those Dregs of Life" in 1730, to accord more logically with the deluge narrative, but then changed "those" back to "these" for 1744. Henry A. Burd may not therefore be entirely correct to claim that Thomson "follows the classical poets in picturing his own [time] as the Iron Age."[41]

Thomson then traces a development from this present-tense iron age to a time apparently following which, upsetting the reader's sense of order, is rendered in the past tense. Taking a hint from Paradise Lost, in which earth gives "signs of woe" at Man's fall (IX:783), mankind's "distemper'd Mind" leads (with only the briefest 'period' between "Heart" and "Nature") to a complementary change in nature itself:

> At last, extinct each social Feeling, fell
> And joyless Inhumanity pervades,
> And petrifies the Heart. Nature disturb'd
> Is deem'd, vindictive, to have chang'd her Course.
> HENCE, in old dusky Time, a Deluge came:
> When the deep-cleft disparting Orb, that arch'd
> The central Waters round, impetuous rush'd,
> With universal Burst, into the Gulph,
> And o'er the high-pil'd Hills of fractur'd Earth
> Wide-dash'd the Waves, in Undulation vast;
> Till, from the Center to the streaming Clouds,
> A shoreless Ocean tumbled round the Globe.

(305-16)

In Røstvig's analysis, the point of the Golden Age and Iron Times for Thomson was that they illustrated the interconnectedness of the "internal moral world and the external world."[42] This interconnection, however, is neither stated explicitly nor explained. Thomson's description of the deluge recalls Ovid's, but Ovid's flood is a punishment from Jupiter, just as the equivalent Biblical source ascribes the flood to God's punishment of Man. In Thomson's account, however, there is no mention of God; it is Nature that is "vindictive."

A work such as Thomas Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth (1681-89), which attempts to reconcile the latest developments in geological science with scripture, illustrates the difficulty of explaining the deluge as a natural occurrence as well as a moral punishment. "Let us then suppose," Burnet writes, "that at a time appointed by Divine Providence, and from Causes made ready to do that great execution upon a sinful World, that this Abysse was open'd [to let out the flood waters]."[43] Though in Burnet's account Providence appoints the time appropriate to "a sinful World," "Causes" are physical rather than moral, and can thus be fit into a logical pattern in which any change is prepared for (geologically, though not morally) thousands of years in advance: "the disruption of the Abysse, or dissolution of the primæval Earth and its fall into the Abysse, was the cause of the Universal Deluge, and of the destruction of the old World."[44] The result is that geological events appear causally unrelated to, though divinely synchronized with, the moral state of mankind.

By the time Thomson came to write The Seasons, "popular opinion was beginning to reject Burnet," but Thomson drew largely upon Burnet's theory because "it was not [the] science [in Burnet] that captivated Thomson," but the "vision."[45] Like Burnet, Thomson inserts a "disruption" or "dissolution" (what Thomson calls "Nature disturb'd"), as a kind of go-between to link the Golden Age with the deluge: the Iron Times are meant

to smooth the transition, which is why the Iron Times section is so carefully balanced between pastoral and georgic. The Iron Times do manage to intercede between the preceding Golden Age and subsequent deluge, by appearing as the result of the laziness of the one and by foreshadowing the other in the figurative language of emotional storms. However, the line of connection is a fragile one. The verse paragraph on the Iron Times raises further questions about this epoch's own relation to the times before and after.

Thomson borrows Burnet's misleading use of the language of logic to imply causal connection where there is none. Thomson writes "HENCE" not only to connect the deluge with the previous lines on nature changing her course, but also to suggest that the deluge is logically connected to the world's fall into evil. Without any reference to God's intervention, "HENCE" hovers without clear relation either to what precedes or what follows it in the poem. It is an attempt at the kind of incremental, causal change involved in georgic time, but makes little sense when the cause of Nature's change is itself unexplained.

After the deluge Thomson can move more confidently into the moving world of the seasons. However, whereas the Golden Age is predominantly pastoral with important georgic inflections, and the Iron Times gives almost equal space to each, here the predominantly georgic vision retains heavy traces of pastoral. The verse returns to thoughts of the Golden Age almost immediately.

> THE Seasons since have, with severer Sway,
> Oppress'd a broken World: the Winter keen
> Shook forth his Waste of Snows; and Summer short
> His pestilential Heats. Great Spring, before,
> Green'd all the Year; and Fruits and Blossoms blush'd,
> In social Sweetness, on the self-same Bough.

(317-22)

The nature of this time "since" the deluge, and its relation to the preceding Iron Times, is ambiguous from the beginning. The word "severer" suggests that seasons had existed in some milder form in the Iron Times, though when and how they came to be after the time "before" when "Great Spring … Green'd all the Year" remains mysterious.

The image of "Fruits and Blossoms … on the self-same Bough" is a typical one of neoclassical pastoral, found in Spenser and Milton.[46] It represents the simultaneity of spring and autumn within one ideal, endless season. The effect is to draw a stark contrast with the divided summer and winter of the "broken World." But when we look at Thomson's description of this recollected time "before," and his further contrasting images of the "broken World," we find the two merging even in Thomson's emphatic distinctions.

Pure was the temperate Air; an even Calm
Perpetual reign'd, save what the Zephyrs bland
Breath'd o'er the blue Expanse: for then nor Storms
Were taught to blow, nor Hurricanes to rage;
Sound slept the Waters; no sulphureous Glooms
Swell'd in the Sky, and sent the Lightning forth;
While sickly Damps, and cold autumnal Fogs,
Hung not, relaxing, on the Springs of Life.
But now, of turbid Elements the Sport,
From Clear to Cloudy tost, from Hot to Cold,
And Dry to Moist, with inward-eating Change,
Our drooping Days are dwindled down to Nought,

Their Period finish'd ere 'tis well begun.

(323-35)

Thomson describes the "broken World" by its contrast with the time "before," and then describes that time before by its difference from the time "now." The effect of this to-and-fro is the meeting of the "bland" spring with the "sickly Damps, and cold autumnal Fogs" within one vision and one sentence. The result is that spring and autumn do appear side by side—literally, in lines 329 and 330—as each one is presented as the negative image of the other. When we finally come to the line "From Clear to Cloudy tost, from Hot to Cold, / And Dry to Moist," we hardly know whether the description is of the Golden Age, the Iron Times, or the post-diluvian age; after all, it does sound quite similar to the description of the weather in the Golden Age, with its gales, sun, and clouds. The reference to "inward-eating Change" is an assertive claim to georgic time, and the final two lines, "Our drooping Days are dwindled down to Nought, / Their Period finish'd ere 'tis well begun," ostensibly describe the georgic experience of fleeting time, the hours running away on short winter days. Yet, these "drooping" Days recall the "listless" ones of the Iron Times.

The georgic elements in the Golden Age prepared the way for the transition to the Iron Times in their hints at the possibility of change. The Iron Times looked back to the Golden Age in their temporal stasis, but forward to the post-diluvian world in their vocabulary of changeable weather. In turn, the "broken World" of the seasons is haunted by the memories of the previous ages, raising the question of how much has really changed. Thomson's generic modulations allow him to establish differences in the dominant tone and temporality of each age, but also to suggest continuity. The result is that we can trace a line of development, of the incremental growth that is natural to georgic. However, the georgic imagery can only do so much work, and the pastoral quality in each section demands that we question the logical and chronological relations

between the ages: are the Golden Age, Iron Times, and post-diluvian broken world in fact a collection of unrelated pictures, which might depict the past, the present, or the future, or might even exist in simultaneity? Is this the georgic world of "growth, motion and time," to borrow Cohen's phrasing, or is time "irrelevant"?

From here, Thomson will move into what Rachel Crawford calls "the fundamental georgic poem of the [eighteenth] century and perhaps the most fundamental English georgic of all time."[47] But the Golden Age and Iron Times episode is emblematic in its blend of pastoral with georgic elements, even though the emphasis will be reversed for the rest of The Seasons to give greater prominence to movement and gradual change. Nevertheless, The Seasons will retain its pastoral modal qualities of sudden, inexplicable change, of temporal suspension, and of lazy pleasure.

"Now is the Time": Conclusion

Røstvig, in emphasizing the interconnection between mind and nature in the Golden Age/Iron Times passage, claims that "[t]he question of chronological or cultural primitivism was not really important to [Thomson]."[48] I would modify this claim. The chronology of his narrative of decline is extremely important to Thomson, insofar as he is committed to scrambling and mystifying that chronology. In Røstvig's reading, "[t]he rest of the poem proceeds on the tacit assumption that vernal nature is the Golden Age, and that it is not too late for man to be redeemed if only he would expose himself to the universal smile of nature."[49] Indeed, in his closing "Hymn", Thomson reflects on the glory of God in nature and declares that, in such present beauty, "the GREAT SHEPHERD reigns; / And yet again the golden age returns" (77-78 [1730]). In Burd's reading, Thomson "transfers the Golden Age from the remote past to the present and now it exists

in the country alongside the Iron Age in the city."[50] The Iron Age, of course, is both an ante-diluvian past age and the same age that continues after the deluge up to the present. The Golden Age and Iron Times are at once past, present, and future, as well as both real and fictional. Thomson's hybrid pastoral-georgic temporality allows him to embrace and endorse paradoxical alternatives: to posit progress as well as decline, to celebrate growth as well as stillness, activity as well as rest, and to suggest that time incorporates both natural, ongoing narratives and sudden, unexpected alterations.

As I have suggested, the thematic portrayal of time as a mixture of pastoral stillness-punctuated-by-sudden-change and georgic organic movement is reflected in the formal transitions of the poetry itself, such as from animals to music to poetry, or from the boundless passions of the Iron Times to the "shoreless Ocean" of the deluge. Thomson's commitment to simultaneously asserting and mystifying the chronological relation between ages and events in this episode is mirrored in his structuring of The Seasons as a whole.

The result is a poem that can be, and has been, read not only in different but in directly opposing ways. On one side is Samuel Johnson: "The great defect of the Seasons is want of method; but 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."[51] Similarly, in 1753 Robert Shiels observed that within each book of The Seasons "[t]here appears no particular design; the parts are not subservient to one another; nor is there any dependance [sic] or connection throughout."[52] For these critics, the reader of The Seasons is faced with a collection of apparently discrete set-pieces, which can be lifted out of the larger work and enjoyed (and anthologized) as lyrics or descriptive pictures. There is no overarching coherent narrative to follow from beginning to end.

Yet, Shiels also writes that the parts of the poem "flow naturally."[53] How is this possible if there is no "dependance or connection"? In 1777, John More also wrote about

the flowing quality of The Seasons: "Distinct as the seasons of the year may seem to a superficial observer, the weather, the objects, and the sentiments which discriminate them most, yet run into one another."[54] In order to embrace the onward movement of the poem, More advocates reading The Seasons "from end to end, and inspect[ing] the agreeable workings of your own feelings, as you proceed."[55] In this way, the reading experience is that of reading the Georgics, as described by Addison:

> [The poem's precepts] shou'd all be so finely wrought together into the same Piece, that no course Seam may discover where they joyn; as in a Curious Brede of Needle-Work, one Colour falls away by such just degrees, and another rises so insensibly, that we see the variety, without being able to distinguish the total vanishing of the one from the first appearance of the other.[56]

Instead of trying to decide whether The Seasons is a georgic poem that flows naturally from one idea to the next, or a pastoral "series of assertions," we ought rather to ask how Thomson succeeds in writing a poem that could produce two such different experiences in its readers.[57] I do not propose that the Golden Age and Iron Times passage was written as a conscious prospectus or statement of intent for The Seasons as a whole, but in this passage we see Thomson engaging with questions of change and continuity at the level of content as well as form, and in it we see most clearly his technique for creating this ambiguous effect through generic modulation. In this way, the passage, which appears so uncharacteristic of The Seasons as a whole, can illuminate helpfully the techniques that Thomson employs elsewhere in his poem.

After describing the deluge, Thomson resumes his theme of vegetarianism, before picking up again his imagery of rains and floods:

NOW when the first foul Torrent of the Brooks,

Swell'd with the vernal Rains, is ebb'd away;

And, whitening, down their mossy-190tinctur'd Stream

Descends the billowy Foam …

(379-82)

Jung argues that the use of "NOW" in line 379 is not "used in its temporal meaning," noting the "incongruity between the present of the temporal 'now' and the past tense 'swelled.'" Rather, this "NOW" "ought to be understood as an interjective statement that abruptly introduces a new passage."[58] At first, however, the water ebbing away suggests that we are rejoining the linear, historical narrative of the deluge, and that Thomson is about to describe the world as it appeared when the floodwaters first receded. Then Thomson spectacularly undermines this particular possibility of continuity:

… now is the Time,

While yet the dark-brown Water aids the Guile,

To tempt the Trout.

(382-84)

The change of tone, from mythic history and solemn moralizing to sporting, is undeniably abrupt. On the other hand, we can see how this passage on fishing looks back to the preceding lines about animal rights, albeit in an ambivalent way, as well as how it rejoins the original narrative of spring rainfall. We can read this passage as both a natural progression of the numerous themes which Thomson has been developing, or as a comically spontaneous break from the past of his own poem.

The fishing scene was added in 1744, after rural pursuits had become established as a georgic subject alongside labor in works such as William Somervile's The Chace (1735) and John Gay's Rural Sports (1713). The language of urgency and timeliness ("now is the Time") is expressive of georgic temporality. Or is this merely a reworking of Asphalion's dream: a pastoral fantasy stealing time from real work? The combination of leisure and exertion leads almost inevitably back into a lifestyle that resembles pastoral. Immediately after the fish is caught, the poem continues:

> THUS pass the temperate Hours: but when the Sun
> Shakes from his Noon-day Throne the scattering Clouds,
> Even shooting listless Languor thro' the Deeps;
> Then seek the Bank where flowering Elders croud
> […]
> There let the Classic Page thy Fancy lead
> Thro' rural Scenes; such as the Mantuan Swain
> Paints in the matchless Harmony of Song.
>
> (443-57)

Time "passes," but the midday sun invites "listless Languor," recalling the "listless Unconcern" of the Iron Times as well as the "blooming Ease" of swains reclining under branches in the Golden Age. Chalker assumes that the Mantuan Swain's "Classic Page" referred to here is that of the Georgics, but it could as easily be the Eclogues.[59] Thomson has a heightened awareness of the difference between the two, but remains determined to confound that difference even as he exploits it.

[1] James Thomson, The Seasons, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). All references are to this edition, and unless otherwise stated to the 1744-46 edition of The Seasons.

[2] Alastair Fowler, Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 190, 206.

[3] Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of the Seasons: A Study of James Thomson's Poem* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 31.

[4] Alexander Pope, "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry," in The Works of Alexander Pope, ed. Whitwell Elwin (London: John Murray, 1871), 258, 257.

[5] Ibid., 258.

[6] Paul Alpers, What is Pastoral? (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), x.

[7] David Scott Wilson-Okamura, Virgil in the Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67, 66.

[8] Fowler, Kinds, 89.

[9] Pope, "Discourse on Pastoral Poetry," 260.

[10] Cohen, Unfolding, 30-31.

[11] Cohen, Unfolding, 31.

[12] Alpers, Pastoral, 68-69.

[13] John Dryden, trans. "The First Pastoral," in The works of Virgil containing his Pastorals, Georgics, and Aeneis (London: Jacob Tonson, 1697), 5. All subsequent references to Virgil's works are to Dryden's translations in this edition.

[14] Thomas Creech, trans. The Idylliums of Theocritus (London: E. Curll, 1721), 69.

[15] "'Suspension' is the word that best conveys how the oppositions and disparities of Virgilian pastoral are related to each other and held in the mind," writes Alpers, Pastoral, 68.

[16] James Turner, The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630-1660 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 42.

[17] Andrew Marvell, "The Garden," in The Complete Poems, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (London: Penguin, 2005), 102.

[18] Ibid., 101.

[19] Alpers, Pastoral, 68.

[20] David Fairer, English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1789 (London: Longman, 2003), 99.

[21] Joseph Addison, “An Essay on the Georgics,” in The Works of Virgil, unpaginated.

[22] Anthony Low, The Georgic Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 12.

[23] Wilson-Okamura, Virgil, 83, 78.

[24] Fowler, Kinds, 254.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Alexander Pope, The Major Works, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.

[27] David Fairer, “The pastoral-georgic tradition,” in William Wordsworth in Context, ed. Andrew Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 111.

[28] John Philips, Cyder. A Poem in Two Books (London: Jacob Tonson, 1708), 59, 68, 69, 87.

[29] Sandro Jung, “Epic, Ode, or Something New: The Blending of Genres in Thomson’s Spring,” Papers on Language and Literature 43 (2007): 161.

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