



2012 Issue No. 21 — Rethinking the Seasons: New Approaches to Nature

The Seasons: Homage to Henry David Thoreau

By Rod Giblett

All cultures have seasons, an understanding of the cycles of the year, especially the growing, gathering and hunting periods, and the predominantly hot or cold, wet or dry times of the year that are related to those periods, and indeed make them possible. Yet the number and nature of the seasons and their physiological and psychological affects varies widely across cultures. The seasons play an important role in organizing a sense of time, of the progression of the year, of the cycle of the year, and of the years. Their role has also changed over time, especially from Paleolithic hunter-gather societies to Neolithic agricultural ones, and then to modern industrialised ones. The seasons have a history. The term 'season' has a history deriving, as McClatchy (13) points out, from the Latin for 'sowing' and so referring only to spring, and to agricultural societies. The names for the seasons also have a history as it was not until the sixteenth century that their names were stabilised in English, French and German (see Enkvist 90 and 157).

The role of the four seasons in Europe has also changed historically from when sowing, reaping, and fallowing were periods vital for survival in the mainly agricultural society of Neolithic Europe and in its colonial diasporas to a predominantly urban society, and then to a later globalised world, when there is always a growing period occurring somewhere in the world. The four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter are a European cultural construction of nature. More precisely, they are a construction of what Cicero called second nature, of nature worked by agriculture. Even more precisely, they are a construction of what Alexander Wilson called a culture of nature and of what I have elsewhere called the second culture of nature (drawing on Cicero and Wilson; see Giblett, *People and places* chapter 1).

The four European seasons were imposed on the antipodean, upside-down world of Australia, and on its climates considered vaguely and inappropriately 'Mediterranean' or 'Temperate' modelled on European exemplars, and on indigenous seasons – six in the case of some Australian aboriginal groups, such as the Noongars of south-western Australia:

[Birak](#) - dry and hot - December/January

[Bunuru](#) - hottest part of the year, with sparse rainfall - February/March

[Djeran](#) - cooler weather begins - April/May

[Makuru](#) - usually the wettest part of the year - June/July

[Djilba](#) - often the coldest part of the year - August/September

Kambarang - warmer with longer dry periods - October / November.

These six seasons of two months each were the result of long term observation and close engagement with local place whereas the European four seasons of three months each were simply inverted for the southern hemisphere, imposed on Australia and associated with European climates based on cursory observation and minimal engagement with local places.

Yet the assigning of months to the Noongars' cycle of the seasons is notional as Colleen Hayward, a senior Noongar woman and head of the Kurongkurl Katijin Centre for Indigenous Studies at Edith Cowan University, says: the Noongar seasons are related to the weather, not to the months, and to the changes in the plants. The twelve months of the year are based loosely on the lunar cycle in which the moon orbits the earth 13.4 times a year and so the months are largely natural and trans-cultural in that regard. Yet the names for the months constitute the Julian calendar developed and introduced by Julius Caesar that enshrines his name in July and Augustus Caesar's in August and other months in Latin numeral names which are now out of alignment as the Julian calendar was originally ten months (September, literally the seventh month, is now the ninth; October, literally the eighth, is now the tenth; November, literally the ninth, is now the eleventh; December, literally the tenth, is now the twelfth). These names for the months are another European cultural construction of nature, another instance of the second culture of nature.

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology, by contrast to the Noongars, not only enshrines the four European seasons in dividing the year in Australia, as in Europe (albeit inverted), into four quarters (and seasons) of three months each, but also divides the seasons in accordance with the months:

in Australia, the seasons are defined by grouping the calendar months in the following way:

Spring - the three transition months September, October and November.

Summer - the three hottest months December, January and February.

Autumn - the transition months March, April and May.

Winter - the three coldest months June, July and August.

(www.bom.gov.au/climate/glossary/seasons.shtml)

This division says nothing about the driest or wettest months, or seasons, presumably because they vary so widely across Australia. The seasons (and the months) derived from one place and one side of the world else are transported and transcribed onto Australia and the other side of the world. The seasons developed from observation and living with the land in a local place by one culture are displaced and superseded by seasons from another place and culture.

The historical, cross-cultural conflict over the seasons in Australia was summed up in the brochure for a recent exhibition at the Ian Potter Centre in Melbourne in which Stephen Gilchrist and Allison Holland (22) state that:

the four seasons of the northern hemisphere, transposed to Australia more than 200 years ago, are largely discordant with the antipodean environment. Aboriginal people have developed a highly sensitive understanding of the environment through experiential engagement. Those who had spent a lifetime in its embrace read the subtle variances of shifting seasons.

By contrast, those who had *not* spent a lifetime in the embrace of Australia read the European

four seasons crudely onto them and the indigenous seasons were thereby colonised. Gilchrist and Holland see this merely as a matter of historical fact rather than as concern for contemporary politics about dispossession of place (and distempering of time). The two seasonal systems, and cultures, for them sit side-by-side in mutual antagonism and incomprehension.

Yet time and the seasons have been colonised as the preceding discussion of the European seasons, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, the Noongar seasons and Gilchrist's and Holland's statement indicate, and so they need to be decolonised, just as people and places have been and still are. These discussions indicate that the seasons are involved in a cultural politics operating between, and in, nations and people, and that the seasons are a site of struggle enmeshed in power relations over what and how they mean. As colonisation took place not only of space but also of time, and of the seasons as both a spatial and temporal category, so decolonisation of time, and the seasons, needs to take place. This could involve learning, understanding and using in everyday speech the indigenous names for the seasons instead of the four European seasons. It would certainly involve valuing an indigenous understanding of the seasons in Australia.

The seasons have played a role within the cultural politics of nations, especially in what Perry Miller ("Nature and the National Ego" 209 and "The Romantic Dilemma" 201) called "nature's nation," the United States of America. Just as settler America colonised space with its fifty states, so it colonised time with the seasons of spring, fall (autumn), summer and winter. Just as it crossed, and closed, a succession of spatial frontiers in pursuit of the fulfilment of its "Manifest Destiny" to occupy the area of what is now the lower forty eight states, so it defined the temporal frontiers of, and between, the seasons, albeit with some condescension to "Indian summer" and with a variation on autumn as "fall," which has a medieval ancestry anyway (see Enkvist 159). Just as it celebrated the West and its passing nostalgically in music, song, word, and image (still and moving), so it celebrated in the same media the seasons, and their passing, and was nostalgic for a time when the seasons were more appreciated, more distinct from each other and more immediately vital for sustaining life (see Kammen).

Settler Americans, Kammen (107) argues, "blended nature, nationalism, and nostalgia in understanding the seasons," just as they did in founding and photographing national parks, and in preserving and photographing wilderness areas (see Giblett, *People and Places* especially chapters 5 and 7; *Landscapes of Culture and Nature* especially chapter 6). The celebration of the seasons provided a nostalgic screen on which to project nationalistic phantasies about nature. For instance, Ansel Adams's famous photograph, "Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite National Park" (1944), is an illustration of this point (Adams plate 51). The title combines references to the season (winter), weather (stormy) and place (mountainous). Each aspect of the title and composition is equally important in the photograph's evocation of the sublime with its affects of awe and terror in the face of monumental objects. These sublime affects relate to other sublime aspects of the photo, including the season of winter, the stormy weather, the mountainous cloudscape and landscape, and the hard and rocky place. Time and place, including season, weather and mountain, are tied up with each other in Adams's photo. [1] It is the culmination of a long tradition whose medieval manifestations are traced by Enkvist:

many poetic passages describing [or photographic images depicting] the times of the year are clothed in terms of landscape, whilst most verbal [and visual] pictures of outdoor scenery depict a season. (v)

"Wintry storm" is a stock-in-trade device of seasonal description as Enkvist shows later. James Thomson's "The seasons" of the eighteenth century is the exemplar of this tradition of seasonal landscape descriptive imbrication (as we will see shortly) that lives on in much landscape photography, especially on calendars.

The seasons, however, are not merely a matter of idle historical curiosity. They play a much more vital role in contemporary cultural and environmental politics. In the age of human-made climate change there are more floods and droughts occurring more frequently. Floods are often occurring in dry seasons and droughts in wet seasons. Floods are also occurring in the middle of droughts. As the seasons in many places are becoming more extreme with wetter or hotter dry seasons and years, and drier or wetter wet seasons, and years, the distinction between them is increasingly blurred. Paying attention to the seasons becomes more critical in this context as a way of making sense of climate and weather for earthly survival, let alone environmental sustainability. As part of climate change and global warming, seasonal shift is occurring. Seasons are shifting temporally as the weather associated with one season is experienced in another. Seasons are also shifting spatially as the weather associated with one place is experienced in another. I thus propose “seasonal dislocation” or “seasonal disruption” as a better, more precise and poetic way to describe the phenomena referred to as “climate change,” or “global warming,” or “global climate disruption” as proposed by the White House in September 2010, all of which do not acknowledge the seasons as a way of making sense of meteorological phenomena.

Having an appreciation for the cycle of the seasons is a way of connecting the local and the global by acknowledging the current season here and now, and the changes that will take place in the shift from one season to the next with the rotation of the earth. It is also a way of understanding that global warming impacts on local place, the micro-climate, and that local activity affects global weather, the macro-climate. Having an appreciation for the cycle of the seasons is also a way of connecting with the local and resisting globalisation by living in bio- and psycho-symbiosis in a bioregional home habitat of the living earth (see Giblett, *People and Places* chapter 12). Developing a richer, more sensual, more embodied appreciation of and for the seasons and local place could involve appreciating the sounds of spring, the sights of autumn, the feel of summer, the tastes of winter; the sounds of birds chirping and of leaves rustling in spring; the sight of the earth in autumn, the browning and fall of leaves; the feel of the sun’s heat on the skin; the taste of cold water in the mouth in winter; the smell of flowers in spring, of dried leaves in autumn, of cooking food or burning wood in summer, of liquids in winter.

Exemplary in this regard as a thinker about the seasons is the nineteenth century writer Henry David Thoreau (501) who Rick Bass (1) calls “that most American of thinkers and spirits” and whose most famous book, *Walden*, Lawrence Buell calls “the most famous of all American season books” (232). Thoreau advised his readers to “live in each season as its passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. Let these be your only diet-drink and botanical medicine” (501). In other words, eat, drink and breathe locally, merrily and seasonally, not globally and trans-seasonally. One way in which Thoreau advocated an appreciation for the seasons was by having street trees planted that “mark the season. . . . Let us have Willows for spring, Elms for summer, Maples and Walnuts and Tupeloes for autumn, Evergreens for winter and Oaks for all seasons” (386). Australians should mark the Aboriginal seasons of their local place by appreciating the native species that flower in succession, often through six months of the year in some highly biodiverse places.

History, geography and culture (or time, place and people) meet in the seasons. The seasons have a cultural history and a historical geography. They are just not a matter of what is called “the natural environment” as a static, immutable construct. They are a dynamic and mutable phenomenon. Nor are they just a matter of the past. An environmental history, or historical geography, of the seasons would be concerned with the seasons in the past. Yet the seasons are operating in the present and will be in the future. With what Paul Carter calls spatial history, “the future is invented” and “travellers and settlers do not so much belong to our past as we belong to their future” (294). Similarly with what I would call temporal geography, the geography of time (past, present and future; the cycle of the seasons), the future is invented and, as Carter puts it, “we recover the possibility of another history, our future” (295). Such a future would be marked

by an appreciation for the seasons in a political ecology that would include decolonisation of the European four seasons and appreciation for indigenous seasons.

History is located in spaces and places; geography is set in time (past, present and future) including the cycle of the seasons. Spatial history for Carter “begins and ends in language. It is this which makes it history rather than, say, geography’ (xxiii). Yet geography, literally “writing the earth,” begins and ends in language too, whether it is the verbal language of the explorer’s journal about his journey in time through space between places with his record of his observations of flora through the seasons experienced through the course of his journey, or the visual language of his maps making marks on paper in the scalar grid of latitude and longitude. Time and space come together anyway in longitude as measuring time is the means to measure space. Temporal geography begins and ends in the language of time, including writing on the seasons of the earth and on the succession of flowering plants through the seasons. Understanding the meanings, metaphors, landscapes and gender politics of the seasons is part of a better understanding of one’s place on earth and one’s point in time suspended in the present between a past one cannot return to and a future one cannot know but can invent (see Giblett, *Landscapes of Culture and Nature* chapter 9).

The meanings, metaphors, landscapes and gender politics of the seasons are writ large in the writing about the seasons in the European literary canon. Decolonising the European four seasons not only involves a deconstructive reading of this canon but also an appreciation for its dissenter in Henry David Thoreau who developed an embodied sense of the seasonal changes in the world around him. Ideas, attitudes and values about the seasons that are still current today and are still very much a part of the European cultural baggage attached to the seasons and transcribed to Australia can be traced back to, and find their culmination and summation in, James Thomson’s canonical “The seasons.” This obscure eighteenth century poem, whose very existence is unknown to the vast majority of educated speakers of English today, and read by a miniscule few of them, provides nevertheless an entry point into the European tradition of thinking about the seasons and representing them from Virgil through Chaucer to Thoreau and Eliot and to deconstructing and decolonising the four European seasons.

SPRING

Thomson typifies each of the four seasons in quite distinct ways by devoting a long poem to each season. He begins with spring “when nature all/is blooming and benevolent” (Sp ll 9-10 4) [2] coming out of “the faithful bosom of the ground” (Sp l 46 5) and when “Fair-handed Spring unbosoms every grace” (Sp l 529 23). The earth in spring is feminised as the good agricultural and horticultural mother earth. Spring is the time when “Nature’s ample lap” (Sp l 182 10) bears fruit. Yet to do this nature in spring requires the sun. She requires the power of the sun to bloom. The position of the sun in the sky, its angle of inclination due to the angle of inclination of the earth’s axis, is the determinant of the seasons. The higher the position of the sun in the sky, the longer are the days, the greater yield of the sun’s energy to, and reception by, the earth and the greater productivity of plants.

For Thomson “the bounteous sun” (Sp l 26 4) brings forth the bounty of nature to fruition. For him “the penetrative sun,/His force deep-darting to the dark retreat/ Of vegetation” (Sp ll 78-81, 6) penetrates to where “the promised fruit/Lies yet a little embryo” (Sp ll 99-100, 7) in “the pregnant earth” (Su l 1378 104; see also Tuve 76). The sun is masculinised as the active life-giving force that creates life in the passive feminised earth. The male sun plants the seed in the female earth who is the mere receptacle. Thomson mentions “the sacred plough” (Sp l 58 5) but not the ploughman, sacred or not, nor the sacred earth.

SUMMER

Thomson also masculinises summer with “his pestilential heats” (Sp I 320 15). As “child of the sun, refulgent Summer” (Su I 2 p 53) is more precisely son of the sun with his “secret, strong, attractive force” (Su I 97 56). Summer for Thomson is pestilential, especially around swamps in accordance with the prevailing miasmatic theory of disease of his day: “The hoary fen/In putrid streams emits the living cloud of pestilence” (Su II 292-4, 64). Later “the joyless sun,/ . . . draws copious steam from swampy fens,/ where putrefaction into life ferments/ And breathes destructive myriads” and brings forth “the dire power of pestilent disease” (Su II 1027-35 89). According to Thomson, the sun not only brings forth new life out of dry ground, but also brings forth death out of wetlands in accordance with the miasmatic theory of disease in Hippocratic medicine (see Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands* chapter 5). He is following in the footsteps of Virgil in *The Georgics* in his description of “Land that is breathing out lank mist and volatile vapours” (II, I.217).

Thomson, based in a temperate climate, is reproducing Virgil’s view based in a Mediterranean climate. Along similar lines to both, for the Baroque composer Antonio Vivaldi (xii) in his sonnet “Summer” for *The Four Seasons* summer is “the harsh season ignited by the sun” when “men and flock languish.” As it is the season of heat, fear of storms, lightning and “fiery thunder” it has traditionally been associated with the element of fire. Similarly summer for Hesiod in the late eighth century BCE is the season of fatigue (56). Vivaldi’s and Hesiod’s Mediterranean view of summer contrasts with the temperate view of Langland and Chaucer and indicates some intra-European cultural variability across the climatic zones of Europe, though Thomson attests to the durability of Hesiod’s and Virgil’s classical view across Europe and its climatic zones. For the medieval Langland in the Prologue to *Piers Plowman* “a summer season · when soft was the sun” is the time of the year when he goes widely in the world wonders to hear. This alliterative collocation of “summer,” “season,” “soft,” and “sun” was a typical rhetorical ploy of the middle-ages found also, for instance, in Chaucer’s “Roundel” (McClatchy 74; see Enkvist 84, 86, 95).

WINTER

Thomson also masculinises winter as a time of the “wild” and “waste” (Sp I 25 4) and as “the wild season” (Au I 64 135). He repeatedly exploits the medieval and Elizabethan collocation that alliterates winter with wild, waste and wilderness. He is following in the footsteps of the Elizabethan Edmund Spenser (15) for whom “thou barren ground, whom winter’s wrath has wasted/ Art made a mirror to behold my plight.” In the mirror of winter he sees “Such rage as winter’s reigneth in my heart.” Thomson also exploits the pathetic fallacy that poses parallels between the state of nature and the state of the mind-body. When “winter falls,/ A heavy gloom oppressive o’er the world” (W II 57-8 187) blankets everything. “The soul of man dies in him, loathing life,/ And black with more than melancholy views” (W II 60-1 187) the soul suffers from “black glooms” (W I 73 187) and “black despair” (W I 289 196) in “Dread Winter,” (W I 1024 223).

Thomson also draws parallels between the landscape and the mind and body. Unlike the pleasing prospects of spring and summer, winter has a ‘horrid prospect’ (W I 281 196) of “horrid mountains. . . Cruel as death, and hungry as the grave” (W II 390 and 393 200). Winter for Thomson is “the cruel season” (W I 243 195), as it is for Elizabethan Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset (McClatchy 194). Virgil refers to “cruel winters” in *The Georgics* (II, I.373), the classical ur-text on the four European seasons. Yet for T. S. Eliot in the opening lines of “The Waste Land” mid-spring “April is the cruellest month” as new life is forced out of its comfortable wintry repose:

April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain.
 Winter kept us warm, covering
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
 A little life with dried tubers.
 Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
 With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.

For Chaucer in the opening lines of the "Prologue" to *Canterbury Tales* April is also, like Eliot, the month of burgeoning new life tinged with cruelty:

When April with his showers sweet with fruit
 The drought of March has pierced unto the root
 And bathed each vein with liquor that has power
 To generate therein and sire the flower;
 When Zephyr also has, with his sweet breath,
 Quickened again, in every holt and heath,
 The tender shoots and buds, and the young sun
 Into the Ram one half his course has run,
 And many little birds make melody
 That sleep through all the night with open eye
 (So Nature pricks them on to ramp and rage) -
 Then do folk long to go on pilgrimage . . .

One Chaucerian scholar has linked these lines from Chaucer's "Prologue" to lines from Virgil's *Georgics* (II, ll.324-7) when:

in spring the swelling earth aches for the seed of new life.
 Then the omnipotent Father of air [Aether] in fruitful showers
 Comes down to his happy consort
 And greatly breeds upon her great body manifold fruit.
 Then are the trackless copses alive with the trilling of birds,
 And the beasts look for love, their hour come round again:
 Lovely the earth in labour, under a tremulous west wind
 The fields unbosom, a mild moisture is everywhere.

In other words, and in short, father air inseminates mother earth. In what Tuve calls 'the marriage of Ether and Earth' (26), "a union of Aether and Earth" (52), and "the Virgilian idea of the union of the fecund earth with ether" (88), the active and seed-bearing father impregnates a passive and receptive mother who is only a fertile receptacle just as the masculine sun for Thomson planted the seed in a feminised earth. She does not supply an egg for union with his seed, nor carries new life within her for its term before birth. The active role of mother earth in creating new life and the work of the human sower in bringing it forth are obscured in Virgil's account in which the earth labours and brings forth new life. The same Chaucerian scholar has suggested substituting "*Aprille* for *Aether*" in *The Georgics* as "no less intelligible or appealing to Chaucer's English readers" (cited by Tuve 52). Equally and conversely substituting *Aether* for *Aprille* in the "Prologue" would give the same Virgilian sense of the activity of father ether and the passivity of mother earth in Chaucer's account. The idea of "sky gods" and "earth goddesses" is an old one and goes back through Hellenic Greek mythology to gylanic, matrifocal cultures (see Giblett *Body of Nature and Culture* 86-89; *People and Places* 31).

Without mentioning (pagan) father ether, for the medieval Christian Alain of Lille / Alanus de Insulis “winter holds the buried seeds deep in the lap of mother earth, spring sets the captives free, summer ripens the harvests, autumn displays her riches” (37). Earthly and human labour is obscured in ploughing, sowing and reaping, and the seasons alone are credited with agency. The earth is even seen as a feminised prison that captivates life with spring being seen as a liberating force that wrests life from her grasp and sets it free. This line of thought and imagery culminates in the eighteenth century in Thomson’s sublime spring that sublimates life into the ether and in Kant’s dynamical sublime, an extraterrestrial vector on which to escape from the prison of the earth and count ourselves as independent of nature, and the earth (Kant 109, 111).

AUTUMN

Autumn for Thomson is the season of “sickly damps and cold autumnal fogs” (Sp I 329 15). Autumn for him mixes the qualities of coldness and moistness in the element of air. He does not subscribe to the philosophical theory of the qualities and elements as autumn in this schema mixes the qualities of coldness and dryness in the element of the earth (see Arikha fig. 1, 11). The four seasons have been associated traditionally with the four elements of earth, air, fire (or sun) and water: earth with autumn; air with spring; fire with summer; and water with winter (see Arikha fig.1, 11). As the mixing of the four qualities of coldness, moistness, heat and dryness creates each of the four elements, so each of the four seasons mixes these qualities. There is a long tradition of at least one thousand years, going back to Byrhtferth’s Old English manual of 1011CE, that makes the connection between the four qualities, the four elements, the four seasons and the four humours (cited by Enkvist 41; see also the “*Secreta Secretorum*” cited by Enkvist 187-189). These connections build on a much more ancient chain of associations in which the four qualities of coldness, moistness, heat and dryness were mixed to produce the four elements of earth, air, fire and water (see Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands* 156-162).

Winter in this schema is the season that mixes the qualities of coldness and moistness in the element of water. Air in this schema mixes the qualities of heat and moistness giving rise to the beneficent exhalations of rain and is associated with spring, whereas in winter air can be cold and moist, give rise to oppressive and depressive mist and fogs associated with winter, or autumn as Thomson does, whereas for him in summer extreme heat and excessive moisture give rise to malignant miasma, effluvia and malaria (literally “bad air”; see Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands*). Yet for Virgil in *The Georgics* (I, l.43) “cold moisture” is associated with “early spring” whereas in the traditional philosophical schema the qualities of coldness and moistness are associated with watery and wet winter. Yet there is always a blurring between the seasons, and a mixing of the elements in all of them. For Thomson, “sun, and water, earth, and air, / In ever-changing composition [are] mixed” (Au II 635-7 155) in every season. Rick Bass likewise questions the “neat symmetry of the four seasons” and proposes “the fifth season, the space between winter and spring” which he calls “the mud season” (80). In Thomson’s terms, in this season the elements of water and earth are mixed.

Autumn is the time of the changing colours of foliage, though these are not as dramatic in England as they are in North America’s New England. In 1859 Thoreau began his essay ‘Autumnal tints’ by noting that:

Europeans coming to America are surprised by the brilliancy of our autumnal foliage. There is no account of such a phenomenon in English poetry, because the trees acquire but few bright colors there. The most that Thomson says on this subject in his ‘Autumn’ [II 950-4 166] is contained in the lines:

But see the fading, many-coloured woods,
Shade deepening over shade, the country round
Imbrown; a crowded umbrage, dusk and dun,

Of every hue from wan declining green/ To sooty dark...
 The autumnal change of our woods has not made a deep impression on our own
 literature yet. October has hardly tinged our poetry. (367)

Thoreau goes on to rectify this situation in the remainder of his essay to show how American autumnal foliage has made a deep impression on him, and on his senses, and a first impression on American literature beginning with him, and this essay.

Autumn has made more of an impression in English literature on the mind and mood. Autumn for Thomson is the time and place of "the mournful grove," "the dreary shower," and "the wither'd waste" when "the desolated prospect thrills the soul" and "the Power/ Of Philosophic Melancholy comes" (Au ll 990-1005 168). These are the places of "vast embowering shades," "twilight groves," "visionary vales," "weeping grottoes," "prophetic glooms" and "the solemn dusk" (Au ll 1030-3 169). Autumn made a strong impression in similar terms on Alexander Pushkin for whom it is the "season of melancholy" (McClatchy 142). Unlike the homely scenes of spring and summer, autumn for Thomson is an unhomely scene associated with the melancholy and the uncanny whereas for Keats in his ode "To Autumn" it is a season of abundance bathed in benign sunlight. Autumn for him is "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness/ Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun" (McClatchy 123), unlike the harsh sun of summer for Vivaldi.

AESTHETICS

Each of the four European seasons has been associated with an aesthetic category or mode. Or, more precisely, nature in each of the seasons presents itself in an appropriate aesthetic mode or fashion. Kammen suggests that for Thomson "nature is . . . beautiful in summer, melancholy in autumn, sublime and terrible in winter" (69). Spring is missing from this list. Unlike Gerard Manley Hopkins for whom "nothing is so beautiful as spring" (McClatchy 31), for Thomson, nature in both spring and summer presents a pleasing, picturesque prospect, whereas nature in autumn presents a desolate prospect and in winter a horrid prospect. Winter is associated with the sublime for Thomson for, as Kammen suggests, "the rude mountain and the mossy wild" (W l 98 188), "the brooding terrors of the storm" (W l 115 189) and "the wintry blast of death" (Su l 581 75) all evoke the sublime. For Thomson spring is also associated with the sublime, or at least its clouds are: "gentle Spring" whose 'light clouds sublime' (Sp l 30 4) float in its "ethereal mildness" (Sp l 1 3). Clouds sublime, or sublimate, the solid matter of the earth into ether, into air, into gas.

For Thomson nature in both spring and summer presents a picturesque, pleasing prospect. In "Spring" Thomson writes how "From the moist meadow to the withered hill, / Led by the breeze, the vivid verdure runs, / And swell and deepens to the cherished eye" (Sp ll87-9 6). In "Spring" he also writes how, from a height, "the bursting prospect spreads immense around" with verdant field, "darkening heath," "villages embosomed in trees" and "spiry towns" (Sp ll 951-5 pp.38-9). In "Summer" Thomson writes of "the lawny prospect" (Su l 53 55) of "the surface of the enlivened earth, / Graceful with hills and leafy woods, / Her liberal tresses" (Su ll130-2 58). In "Summer" he also exclaims "what a goodly prospect spreads around, / Of hills, and dales, and woods, and lawns, and spires, / And glittering town, and gilded streams" (Su ll 1439-1440, 105-6). Rather than nature for Thomson being beautiful in summer, it is picturesque in both spring and summer. Spring is the time of the "homely scene" (Sp l 786 33) whereas autumn is the time of the unhomely scene. Autumn is arguably an aesthetic experience of the unhomely, or uncanny, a state of fascination and horror as Freud showed (see Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands* chapter 2).

Each of these aesthetic modes has a yield of pleasure associated with it. Winter, associated with the sublime, is a state of pleasure bordering on pain. Winter for Spenser (1579/1932, 11, 14) in the sixteenth century (without the word sublime in his vocabulary) is "the sad season of the year" when "the pleasures" of spring are "buried in the sadness of the dead winter" until they are

“worne away” by the sun and “reliveth” in spring. “Winter’s sorrow” and “winter’s wrath” contrasts for Spenser (25) with “pleasant spring.” Spring and summer, associated with the beautiful and the pleasing prospect of the picturesque, are states of relaxed pleasure. Autumn is a state of “blissful pleasure” for Antonio Vivaldi (xiii) in the “Autumn” sonnet of his *Four Seasons*. Aesthetics has been defined by Serres as “the pleasure of the senses” (329). Most writers about the seasons concentrate on the pleasures of the seasons for the sense of sight. Few write about their pleasures (or pains) for the other senses. Thomson writes about the putrefaction of summer, for instance, but not about what this, or the other phenomena of the seasons, smell like.

Rather than the address of the senses to the other senses besides sight, rather than the impact or affect of the seasons on specific organs of the body, most writers on the seasons are interested in their impact or affect on the mind. As Kammen puts it, there are “the seasons of the mind” (169), or “psychological ‘seasons’ as states of mind” (153) as he earlier put it. For Keats in his poem “The Human Seasons” “there are four seasons in the mind of man”:

Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;
 There are four seasons in the mind of man:
 He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
 Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
 He has his Summer, when luxuriously
 Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves
 To ruminate, and by such dreaming high
 Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves
 His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
 He furleth close; contented so to look
 On mists in idleness – to let fair things
 Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
 He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
 Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

There are also four seasons in the body of man. Each of the four European seasons has been associated with a time of human life, an “age of man.” For the medieval Alain of Lille (29; cited also by Tuve 21) the universe “rejoices in the boyhood of spring,” “advances in the youth of summer,” “matures in the manhood of autumn” and “whitens in the old age of winter.” For the Elizabethan Spenser spring is associated with youth, manhood with summer: “riper years” with autumn and “latter age” with winter (84). For Thomson “Flowering Spring” is linked with childhood; “Summer’s ardent strength” with youth; “Sober Autumn fading into age” with maturity or middle age; and “pale concluding Winter” with old age (W 111029-1032 223). Thoreau goes one step further and associates the seasons with the ages of literary history:

Our summer of English poetry is well-advanced towards its fall, and laden with the fruit and foliage of the season, with bright autumnal tints, but soon the winter will scatter its myriad clustering and shading leaves, and leave only a few desolate and fibrous boughs to sustain the snow and rime, and creak in the blasts of ages. (145)

Naturally he places himself in the flowering and fruitful season of summer and prophesies the fall and frosty winter (of modernism?) to come.

Like Keats, for whom there are “seasons in the mind of man,” for Henry David Thoreau (253, 560, 561) there is a season of the soul and “a landscape of the mind” with its seasons across which “a faint shadow flits. . . . cast by the *wings* of some thought in its vernal or autumnal migration” (for landscapes of the mind, see Giblett, *Landscape of Culture and Nature* part IV). In his poem “The Soul’s Season” he relates how:

A sober mind will walk alone,
 Apart from nature if need be,
 And only its own seasons own,
 For nature having its humanity.

The season of the soul is not necessarily in synch with the season of the earth and sky for:

Sometimes a late autumnal thought
 Has crossed my mind in green July,
 And to its early freshness brought
 Late ripened fruits and an autumnal sky.

A mature, autumnal thought crosses Thoreau's mind belatedly in green, youthful summer and changes the face of summer into autumn. Conversely what he calls "a dry but golden" autumnal thought crosses prematurely the summer greenness of his mind and makes mature autumnal wisdom linger into green and youthful summer:

A dry but golden thought which gleamed
 Athwart the greenness of my mind,
 And prematurely wise it seemed,
 Too ripe mid summer's youthful bowers to find.

The season of the soul may be out of synch with the season of the earth, yet it is still the season of autumn. In another poem without a title he proclaims "I am the Autumnal sun" and later "the winter is lurking within my moods" (Thoreau, 583). Thoreau is in no doubt that there is a season of the soul. He is also drawing on a long history of associating the seasons with age, but he upsets the traditional association by dissociating the seasons of the soul, or mind, with the seasons of the earth. Thoreau deconstructs and decolonises the European cultural construction of the seasons, and the second culture of nature. In this regard, as well as many others (see Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands; People and Places*), he is an exemplary figure.

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Endnotes

1. I discuss Adams's photography much more extensively along these lines in Juha Tolonen's and my *Photography and Landscape*. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2012.

2. I cite "The Seasons" by the poem devoted to a season ("Au," "Sp," "Su" and "W"), line number ("l") or numbers ("ll") and page number.

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Henry David Thoreau's account of his adventure in self-reliance on the shores of a pond in Massachusetts is part social experiment, part spiritual quest is an enduringly influential American classic. By virtue of its casual, offhandedly brilliant wisdom and the easy splendor of its nature writing, Thoreau's account of his immersion in solitude has become a signpost for the modern mind in an increasingly bewildering world. Also included in this edition is Thoreau's famous essay, "Civil Disobedience," inspired by his anti-war and anti-slavery sentiments, which has influenced nonviolent resistance movements around the world ever since. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). In Thoreau's bicentenary, Martin Jenkins looks at the famous American eccentric. A few years ago I went into a bookshop to buy a copy of Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). I couldn't find one, but the assistant could: in the fiction section. This may reflect the difficulty of classifying Thoreau. Was he a nature writer, a poet, a travel writer, a political thinker, even a philosopher – even all of these? Perhaps; but not, I am certain, a novelist! Thoreau's works do not help to classify him. I will therefore ask those of my readers who feel no particular interest in me to pardon me if I undertake to answer some of these questions in this book. In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Henry David Thoreau was fascinated by the endless cycle of the seasons, by the endless pursuit of self-improvement, and by parallels between the two. For Thoreau, the phenomena of the seasons were symbolical of human life: just as plants go through stages such as bud, leaf, flower, and fruit, or seed, seedling, and tree; just as agriculture persuades nature to yield its bounty through planting, cultivating, and harvesting, and delivers that bounty by storing it and bringing it to market; just as all things grow in spring, flourish in summer, ripen in autumn, and go dormant in winter; so, following ancient traditions and his own insights, Thoreau perceived deep patterns in human life and saw virtues like deliberation, discipline, gratitude, reverence, self-trust, magnanimity...