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Winter Part Two: The Explanation

I do not consider myself a writer of poetry. In fact, I normally eschew it in favour of prose, which I feel allows me to be poetic if I feel like it, or choose from any number of literary techniques. However, when choosing a subject for a creative project for a course on literature of the Enlightenment period, I was compelled to attempt a poetic imitation.

An Explanation for the Imitation: I was principally inspired by a close reading of James Thomson's *The Seasons*. With its randomly placed caesura and enstopping, the poem read as though someone was speaking: pauses for dramatic effect, the plethora of small clauses as if the speaker were struggling to describe something, and so on. Any poem that works on such a verbal bent attracts my attention, but that was not the main reason it inspired my project. Rather, it is my propensity to mock any highfalutin habits I come across, whether it be the excessive use of random and unnecessary Latin words in academia, or the high exaltation of human nature, one's surroundings, country, etc. As someone who has been subject to the whims and tantrums of the Atlantic Ocean for all my life, I found a poem praising the seasons to be a target I was unable to pass up.

An Explanation for the Subject Matter: Given the humanistic nature of most Enlightenment literature, I felt that I should write about something that effects me personally, so that I might render it with the same vivid "sentiment" as the stuff I was imitating. Therefore, since I had chosen to take on *The Seasons*, I wanted to include a season, which, according to my "dirty Upper-Canadian" friend, is unique to the Maritime experience. This season is known to most as "Winter Part Two". As some may be aware, there is rarely, if ever, a clear transition from Winter to Spring in this area. Instead, Winter and Spring fight it out from March to the end of May, until June comes and there is an abrupt switch over to Summer. The battle between Winter and Spring is never consistent, and has spurred the utterance of such Maritime phrases as "If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes."

While Winter Part Two is rarely the recipient of any adulation, it is certainly the inheritor of many strong feelings and equally strong language, and consequently seemed like a usable subject.

An Explanation of the Process: The first step was to peruse my notes and text so that I could compile a list of subjects that would be alluded to in my poem. I then took another look at Thomson's *The Seasons*, with careful consideration for the various poetic techniques and conventions found within. This included metrical styles, vocabulary, and more.

I then flipped through some of the other poems we covered to see if there was anything else that could be incorporated, which led to the inclusion of a section from Horace's fourth book of *Odes*. I considered working an interpretation of some of his lines into my poem, but then decided against it since I could not find anything that dealt with the seasons in quite the glorified way that Thomson did. The actual poem quoted deals with the changeover from Winter to Spring, which fit quite well with what I was doing. It also points out the briefness of the change, and how you cannot count on it forever. Furthermore, it links the cycle of the seasons with death, but that was not something I necessarily wanted to tackle, so I tried to take my quotation from a more ambiguous section. I wanted to bring Horace into this since, as an imitation of something from the 18th Century, it always looks good if you can link your work with the Classics. Since this is a

satire, Horace seemed like a good choice.

Once the various Enlightenment aspects were found out, I began to compile a list of the different aspects of Winter Part Two. I drew on my own personal experience, as well as talking to other persons who have lived in this area as I have. I also sought out others who have only come here recently, so as to get the view-point of someone who does not take vulgarities of Atlantic weather patterns for granted. I then divided these aspects under three headings—weather, landscape, and behaviour—and then placed the various Enlightenment attributes under those headings as well. With that as my basic outline, I began to write.

There were two things that I found difficult to do. Firstly, I attempted to equate the “shifty fen” with the monarchy, but found the process a little vague. The answer came to me eventually, whereby I altered the fen metaphor to point towards the Walpole administration, which, while it kept things going, was definitely manipulative and wore the guise of a monarchy. I then made Spring, the absent figure of this poem, the representative of the monarchy (namely George I, my favorite king). The other difficulty I experienced was coming up with short descriptions of each of the writers my narrator sees walking the streets. My goal was to make the descriptions pithy but to also do each writer justice. While short, I believe I captured some select aspects usually cited in their biographies. The selection of which writers was arbitrary, though some attempts were made to place the final three (Gay, Swift and Pope) together given their historical connections.

An Explanation of the Risk Factor: While I have been writing for pleasure for as far back as grade four, I am acutely conscious of the risk inherent in this project. I have not received any training in this area, besides comments left on essays, which has assured me of my ability to be witty and satirical, but not my ability to do so in iambic pentameter. Therefore, I hope that my possible lack of rhythm will be taken into account when marking this project.

Winter Part Two

*The Grace with her sisters and the nymphs now dare
to lead the circle dance nude.*

*“Don’t hope for immortality,” warn the circling seasons
that whirl the warm daylight away.*

-Horace, Odes IV.7

*Look! Winter recedes, pale frigid white-scape
Sublimates from melancholy Gea,
Who lets loose her crystalline fastenings,
And prepares to don her new dress. But I
Know those fastenings are stubborn, and will
Cling with tenacious piety, knowing
That their time has yet to come. For, in the
Maritime main, Winter shall remain as
A sullen thought that came after the same.
Where the sea meets the shore, get ready for
What’s in store, the irrepressible,
And e’er disconcerting, Winter Part Two.*

*She’s a tardy mistress, spoiler of
Juvenile fancy. I trod through a
False ether: moist flakes pool in sepia
Lagoons, nestled ‘tween flaccid snowy mounds.
Incontinent damp muddles the clockwork
Dance, wind-reddened cheeks dream of the sublime.
Gloaming overcomes morning, and cool damp
Sinks to my marrow. One day of mild
Reprieve merits only karmic snowfall.*

*The shifty fen seems, with a nominal
Display of qualifications, to fit
The Spring Mode. An avian strain, amongst
Crumbling dykes and waking sluices, now
Plays the siren, invokes the trust of the
Chemise and pantelon. But, alas! the
Ruse soon revealed, ensnares the unwary
In stiffening inky peat, riveted
With a primordial soup of refuge.*

*Innocent swain, thought the requirements
Met, he greets instead an absent mother;
Spring has sprung elsewhere, while the fen has naught
But a functional wig for a costume.*

*Almost dry, cozy like a sleeping toad,
I view, in phlegmic humour, the wet,
Dithering snow, now to come, now to go,
That sequesters me from Nature's pleasures.
Trapped in random sanctuaries, sipping
Eastern brews, flavoured by the dawning sun,
I watch the foolish travellers, driven
By Bacchic Reason, scaling umber drifts,
Jumping putrid pools. First comes Gray, stumbling
Out of the post office, and instantly
Composing an elegy to dryness.
Next our prolific lexicographer,
At once wanting for a definition
To fit the current climate. Now Gay,
Not gay, with Swift, not swift, crossing tiny
Tarns with icy foundations: I expect
An equally icy retort will be
Forthcoming. Pope, it seems, was out of Town.*

*Satire Divine! Sarcastic Mind! Fit me
With the tools to render the Maritime
Temper, and withstand her fickle tantrums.
Hark! There peeks the sun, mischievously
Winking from his lofty place; because, as
I well know, Phoebus is driving drunk, and
I know Naught what might arrive hereafter.*

Works Cited

Horace, *Odes IV.7*. Latin Lyric and Elegiac Poetry. Ed. Dian J. Rayor and William W. Batstone. New York; Garland Publishing, Inc, 1995. 161